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ANECDOTES

OF THE

ALTAMONT FAMILY.

A NOVEL.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF THE SICILIAN, &c.

“How shall I ’scape the stings of my own conscience?
“Which will for ever rack me with remembrance,
“Haunt me by day, and torture me by night.”

L E E.

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ANECDOTES

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CHAP. I.

ON January the 23d, 17—, notwithstanding a very severe fall of snow, which had rendered the roads almost impassable, and travelling particularly disagreeable, not to say dangerous, Henry Melcombe left London on his way into Wiltshire. He was the only son of a wealthy merchant; had received a very good education, and was at

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this

this period an elegant, well-informed young man of fashion ;—little accustomed to controul, having been early habituated to have the command of plenty of money, he deserved the appellation of a modern pupil of pleasure.

The eighteen months preceding the commencement of this history he had spent upon the Continent, visiting his father's numerous foreign correspondents, by way of a preparatory step to his name being added to the firm of the house ; nor would he have returned to England so soon, but for a very sudden and pressing recal he received from his father, who hoped his presence might impede a marriage in his family, which promised to be very detrimental to his interest. Mr. Melcombe's only sister (of course his aunt) had bestowed her hand very early in life upon one of the first merchants in Amsterdam—a connection which proved highly beneficial in the way of trade to her brother. Her having no children by Mr. Vanderhorst,

was

was in his opinion another very fortunate circumstance; as he had taken care, having had the arrangement of the marriage settlements, that she should have something handsome at her own disposal, admitting she did or did not survive her husband, whose generosity however far exceeded his most sanguine expectations, as he departed this life soon after Mrs. Vanderhorst had entered her forty-sixth year, bequeathing her the bulk of his fortune, amounting to upwards of twelve thousand pounds sterling per annum, to dispose of as she thought proper at her death.

To persuade the widow to return to England became now a very serious consideration to Mr. Melcombe, who visited Holland solely to bring about this desirable event; he was fortunate enough to succeed in his endeavours, and soon returned, commissioned to look out for a proper habitation for so consequential a lady, who chose to reside in the country; a fine house, extensive park, and other *et ceteras*, near some good country

town in Great Britain, having long been the height of her ambition. Her agent was therefore indefatigable in his researches for some modern Eden, likely to realize the ideas she had formed of a country seat in England, her native land ; and finally fixed, with her full approbation, upon Woodley Abbey, a beautiful Gothic mansion, standing in the centre of a very extensive park, situated in Wiltshire, between Marlborough and Devizes, nearest the latter, and answered in every respect the most favourable expectations Mrs. Vanderhorst had ever allowed herself to form of her future residence. The purchase was soon made ; and before the expiration of her mourning Mr. Melcombe had the satisfaction of seeing her established at the Abbey, and of knowing the remainder of her property was safely lodged in the Three per Cent. Consols.

Henry Melcombe had just entered his eleventh year when his aunt took up her abode in Wiltshire ; and as he soon became
a favourite,

a favourite, he was generally considered from that period as the heir of her immense fortune. His father already saw him in imagination one of the richest commoners in Great Britain, yet could not relinquish the idea of taking him into partnership; nor did Mrs. Vanderhorst (as was rather expected) discourage the notion, though she was particularly generous towards him during his residence abroad, which, added to the very ample allowance his father made him, enabled him to enter into every pleasure the various towns he visited during his tour afforded, and to mix with the first society.

For the first five years after Mrs. Vanderhorst's return to England, Mr. Melcombe had entertained some fears she might suffer herself to be persuaded to make a second choice; but before his son went abroad, he had ceased to dread an event so inimical to their joint interest, as she had actually refused some (in his opinion) very unexceptionable offers; and to prevent her time

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from hanging heavy upon her hands, he regularly spent the autumn with her, and had taken a most elegant house in town, soon after her return to England, merely, as he assured her, to be better able to accommodate her during the dreary months of the year. But, unfortunately, when he thought himself most secure, almost immediately after the very *disinterested* proposals of a Bristol merchant, (who had framed an excuse, to visit Mr. Melcombe during his annual residence at the Abbey,) had been rejected even with scorn, an Adonis of twenty, a disciple of the God of War, put all Mrs. Vanderhorst's prudent resolutions to flight, and deranged all her brother's wise plans. Chance introduced her to this military hero, whose regiment was lately come into quarters at Devizes; and while her brother was returning his Bristol friend's visit, their approaching marriage was the general whisper in circulation when he came home. Though very seriously alarmed, he affected not to credit the report, even to those who were kindly

kindly anxious to convince him of its truth; and had prudence enough not to mention it to his sister, contenting himself with determining not to quit Woodley during the present alarming situation of affairs; frequently expatiating upon the beauties of the place, the blessings of a single life, and the peculiar disposition to tyrannize, attributed to young husbands. This Mrs. Vanderhorst warmly denied; alledging old men were the only tyrants to be met with in the married state, particularly if they were, or ever had been, in any commercial line, which almost always contracted the mind, and spoiled the temper: still as she never gave him the least hint of her approaching nuptials, and as the young Officer never appeared at the Abbey, he began to hope the affair had blown over; but determined at all events to recal his son, who, in consequence of this very unexpected summons, arrived in London the evening previous to the commencement of this history, rather diverted, though more chagrined, at the thoughts of his aunt's

marriage, which he supposed had already taken place, not having thought it necessary, in compliance to his father's wishes, to travel night and day, by way of being in time to prevent her playing the fool.

Mr. Melcombe, senior, was not in town, he was informed, when he alighted in Bridge-Street, Blackfriars, nor were there any letters waiting his arrival; but whether her master was at Woodley or at Bath, the old house-keeper could not inform him. As she did not mention his aunt's nuptials, he did not chuse to make any enquiries, resolving to set out for Woodley early the following morning; where, supposing he did or did not find his father, it would require no great degree of penetration to discover whether Mrs. Vanderhorst had changed her name. He was therefore, in consequence of the orders he had given over night, awoke between five and six o'clock, and informed by his servant it had snowed all night, and still continued to do so with unabated violence.

“ Then

"Then the sooner we are upon the road, the better," was his reply.—Not feeling inclined to postpone his journey from any fears of personal danger, he accordingly left London, as has been already mentioned, in most unpropitious weather, and proceeded as expeditiously as four horses could get along in such roads, the snow being already very deep. His reveries were therefore continually interrupted by the frequent jolts of the carriage, the postillions being unable to discern the ruts and other impediments they ought to have avoided; and he was too impatient to reach his journey's end, to attend to the admonitions of the various innkeepers at whose houses he changed horses, though he was very uncertain what sort of a reception he should meet with at Woodley, supposing Mrs. Vanderhorst had disposed of her hand and fortune in favour of the youth (for such his father termed him) she was said to have selected for her lover. Her money, he was convinced, was her sole charm in the young man's eyes, who he understood was a

spurious descendant of a noble family, greatly in want of what she certainly possessed in abundance: therefore ought he to be blamed for taking advantage of an old woman's folly? or rather, he asked himself, how should he have acted had he been in a similar situation? Twelve thousand a-year was a great temptation he agreed, and would purchase many indulgences a needy Lieutenant of foot must never hope to obtain; but then, to marry a woman of fifty-nine, remarkably plain, and in his opinion very proud and overbearing—no, he never could have given his hand to Mrs. Vanderhorst, even to preserve himself from the most abject poverty. Still he would not prejudge his supposed new relation, resolving if he gave him a cordial welcome, to readily forgive his having stepped between him and his aunt's fortune; but if he gave himself airs, or was impertinently condescending, this should be his last visit to the Abbey: and such became his final determination, as he turned into the yard of the Castle at Marlborough,
between

between four and five in the afternoon. The moment the carriage stopped, he ordered fresh horses to carry him on to Woodley, telling a waiter, who presented himself, he should not alight. The landlord himself now approached, to assure him it would be not only infinitely more dangerous, but even impossible, to proceed after dark; and the evening was closing in apace.—Henry was sensible he should be able to get on but slowly, if at all; yet very unwilling to give up the point, told the landlord, “he had no objection to his adding another pair of horses to the four already ordered, if he thought six were more likely to drag him through the snow.”

✓ “Four are quite as likely to take you safe to your journey’s end as six, Sir. I have no desire to impose upon you, though I really wish I could persuade you to stop till morning. You are not aware of the risk you will run in crossing the Downs; besides Woodley lies out of the high road, and ten to one if the boys don’t miss the turning, as

there are no hedges to guide them; and you must know there are hollows between here and Devizes which render that road extremely dangerous in such weather."

These serious remonstrances induced Henry to reflect upon the various accidents that proceeding in a carriage might expose him to meet with; still the natural anxiety he felt to learn whether he must resign all hopes of ever being master of Woodley, made him resolve to pursue his journey on horseback, rather than remain any longer in suspense, which he told the landlord, adding he should take a guide at Kennet or Beckhampton, by whose instructions he might be enabled to steer clear of the pits he mentioned.

The horses had been taken from his carriage the moment he arrived; and he was alighting, meaning to fortify himself against the cold and increasing fall of snow by taking some warm wine, when a hack post-chaise and four from Devizes, as he presumed, drove

drove into the yard: he therefore guessed the landlord had exaggerated the danger, in hopes of inducing him to spend the night under his roof. Wishing to ascertain the truth of his conjectures, he advanced towards an elderly gentleman who was alighting, but not apparently in the most dulcet temper, as he was grumbling at the post-boys for not having drawn nearer the door. Prefacing, however, his question with a polite apology suitable to the occasion, Henry requested to know "whether he should run any serious risk of being stuck fast, or of any other nature, between there and Devizes?"

The person he addressed glanced his eyes first over the speaker, then stared at the handsome though plain carriage which had, from its position, forced him to walk a few steps in the snow; and, finally, frowning contempt upon all around him, he stalked into the house, preceded by the landlord, without deigning to satisfy Henry with respect to the state of the roads.—The young merchant's

temper was not easily ruffled, and he made great allowances for the peevishness or caprice sometimes attendant upon age; besides travelling in such weather, and such roads, was likely to be very severely felt by elderly people: he therefore thought, politely as he had endeavoured to word his enquiry, he might have appeared impertinent; so in hopes of better success, he now addressed the postillions, remarking, "the gentleman they had brought did not seem in a very talkative humour."

"Why no, Sir; his Lordship has been very cross all the way from Chippenham, because we did not make more haste, though he may thank his stars we did not tip him over upon the Downs, for the roads are as bad as bad can be; we have been near five hours coming these twenty miles."

"Well, but do you think I shall run any serious risk if I attempt the Devizes road on horseback?"

"Why, faith, Sir, you would be froze to death if you have nothing worse to fear; I
would

would not go back again this evening for a guinea; and we heard at Kennet that the Devizes road was much worse than our's: but there is a carriage behind us which comes from there, 'tis my belief; if they should stop here, you will be better able to decide. I know, if I was in your place, I should think it safest to stop till morning."

Henry gave the lads half-a-crown to drink, and was proceeding into the house, when the one he had given the money to called out "Here it comes, Sir!"

He turned round, and perceiving his carriage was very much in the way, he ordered it to be backed, to allow the one advancing to draw up to the house; which was scarcely done, before an elegant post-chaise and four fine horses, followed by two outriders, turned round the corner of the walk, and in a few seconds stopped at the door. The equipage, postillions, and footmen were so literally covered with snow, that Henry found it impossible

impossible to discern either the arms upon the carriage, or the livery of the servants: it might therefore be another Peer. The moment the chaise-door was opened, one of the finest young men he thought he had ever seen, jumped out, and fairly ran against him, so intently was the young merchant gazing upon one of the handsomest countenances and the most elegant figure he had ever beheld; and he would certainly have allowed the young stranger to have proceeded into the house without making his purposed enquiry, if that gentleman had not in the politest terms apologized for his involuntary rudeness, which he attributed to his not being able to feel his feet.

Flattered at being thus kindly addressed by a stranger, he assured him there needed no excuse, hoped he had met with no accident, and finally ventured to enquire whether he thought it probable he might reach Devizes in safety, presuming he had come that road.

“ I have,

"I have, Sir; and if you have the slightest regard for your own neck, or for those of the poor devils who must drive you, I would advise you not to pursue your journey in the dark. My boys have both been rolling; and had I been aware of the serious risk we have all run, I would not have left home, much as I want to be in London, therefore thank God for a safe deliverance.—Come you, Sir," turning to the waiter, "what do you stand here for? Shew me into a room where there is a good fire, and get something hot for these poor fellows.—Martin," calling to his valet, who seemed undecided whether he should alight, or not, "you may take the things out—no farther will I go to-night; and do see that the lads and men have something warm immediately, for this waiter will forget them."

"Indeed I shall not, Sir," replied the latter; "if you please to let me shew you into a room, I will order some mulled wine, or whatever your men chuse, to be got ready in a few minutes."

"Fetch

"Fetch the brandy-bottle first," rejoined the stranger.

Away ran the fellow, and returning in a few seconds, begged to know if the gentleman chose any?

"No; give it to the postillions and footmen—they are in most need of it."—This done, "There, now shew me where I can warm myself," he proceeded.

There was something so peculiarly handsome in the animated countenance of the young stranger, and such visible benevolence in his disposition, Henry felt an almost instantaneous regard for him, and a sincere wish they might be better acquainted.—They were still standing very near each other, when the waiter, in obedience to the last orders he had received, said, "Now, gentlemen, if you please."

The stranger, looking at Henry, enquired, in a gay tone, whether he had decided to spend the evening at Marlborough? adding,

"If

"If you are alone, Sir, I wish you would favour me with your company."

"I cannot refuse so kind an invitation, as my greatest objection to stopping so early was the *ennui* I foresaw myself doomed to encounter, without any resource to keep me awake, except my host could have furnished me with a newspaper."

"I only wish my conversation may not prove equally soporific," rejoined the stranger, as they entered a very handsome parlour, enlivened by an excellent fire.—"But have you dined? It was my intention, when I left home, to have taken that repast at Spin-Hill; yet, *early* as it is, I am vulgar enough to feel myself inclined to eat.—Can you bear the idea of a five o'clock dinner?"

"Why, for once in my life, I do not care if I do commit such a solecism against the prevalent fashion; the keenness of the air must plead our excuse for keeping such plebeian hours."—The best the house afforded was therefore ordered to be got ready as soon as possible: the moment they were

were alone, Henry mentioned his unsuccessful application, concerning the state of the roads, to the Peer whose carriage had so immediately preceded the stranger's into the inn yard.

"I am happy to find you can laugh at his Lordship's puerile attempt to display his consequence. Peers are become so common, they are at a loss what behaviour to adopt to ensure the respect they consider as so much their due; yet how few deserve to meet with any!"

"I perceive I am not in company with a titled man," rejoined Henry, in a gay tone; "though your style of travelling would have warranted the supposition."

The return of the waiter prevented a reply, and the stranger asked what Lord had preceded him into Marlborough.

"The Earl of Altamont, Sir."

"Indeed!" he exclaimed, with evident marks of surprise, after a short pause—"I

no

no longer wonder, Sir, your very natural question remained unanswered.—But, waiter, how came his Lordship to travel with four horses?”

“Because, Sir, no innkeeper in such weather would have sent him forward with a pair.”

“You could not have given me a better reason. Does he stop all night?”

“Not if he can possibly avoid it, Sir. His friend, the Dean of ———, where he meant to have spent his evening, is in London.”

“Better and better!” exclaimed the stranger, laughing.—“His Lordship seems to be known at your house?”

“I believe wherever his Lordship has once stopped, he will always be remembered, Sir. He talks of stepping into the Bristol or Exeter mail when they come through, which he considers as the safest conveyance, considering the state of the roads.”

“Let us hope no misfortune will attend so generous a nobleman,” ejaculated the stranger.

stranger, with well-affected gravity.—“ All that amazes me is his ever making use of any other conveyance.”

“ He has calculated which was cheapest, Sir; running post with a pair of horses, after he has knocked up his own, which always take him two or three stages, having his valet in the carriage, and more baggage than most people carry who make it a rule to travel with four in all weathers; and his servant told us he finds the method he pursues cheaper than any stage-coach.”

“ And could a Peer of the realm make such a calculation?” cried the astonished Henry; “ or ever entertain an idea of setting out from any place in a stage?”

“ Were you acquainted with the Earl of Altamont, you would hardly be astonished at meeting him in a stage-waggon,” replied the stranger. “ When he was our age, few young men allowed themselves more indulgences; but a very few years sufficed to embarrass a fortune at first too small to support his rank properly, particularly as he married
very

very early in life for love: however, he soon buried his first Lady, and chose his second out of the City, whose fortune set him once more upon his legs, and he is now as saving as he was formerly profuse, that he may be enabled to make a proper provision for two daughters he has by his second wife, he says; but the world are more inclined to think he is merely gratifying his insatiable avarice.—What has he ordered for dinner, waiter?”

“His Lordship never dines at an inn, Sir; a dish of coffee, or at most a sandwich and a glass of negus, is all I ever knew him order; indeed he very seldom alights, as he generally has some biscuits, and a pint bottle of wine and water ready mixed in the carriage: and his valet declares he frequently takes no other refreshment between Bath and London.”

The young men laughed, while the waiter, highly pleased he had succeeded in diverting them, left the room.

“Surely,”

“Surely,” said Henry, “this must be an exaggerated account.”

“Upon my honour I give the fellow credit for every word he said; and I think you will be equally inclined to believe what certainly does appear improbable, when you have heard a trivial anecdote of this saving Peer which came within my knowledge.— He was going down to his principal seat in Scotland last spring, but stopped short at a friend's within fifty miles of the place of his destination, with whom he usually took a bed *en passant*. He generally travels alone, as the Countess and her daughters commonly contrive to spend a month or two with her father and mother, at some water-drinking place, previous to their joining his Lordship in Scotland. It so happened his friend pressed him this time to stay a fortnight, which was extended to six weeks; but understanding his host meant to visit the Highlands in the course of the summer, he was perforce obliged to hope he would spend a few days at Castle Irnham before he went
his

his tour. The gentleman promised to favour him with his company, and his Lordship went home to prepare for his reception. On the day appointed, a sumptuous dinner was provided, and was ready to be served up, when a courier arrived, who brought the melancholy tidings of his master's coach having been overturned about fourteen miles short of the Castle ; in consequence of which accident, the two ladies and two gentlemen it contained, were incapacitated for the present from pursuing their journey. The Earl of course expressed the greatest regret when he learned what had befallen his friends ; but soon dismissed the servant with a very polite message, and an intimation that he should ride over to see how they were before he slept. This done, his preparations for his expected guests' entertainment next came across him. The cook was instantly summoned, and received orders to stop the spits and boilers, and put every thing by very carefully, as the whole would do again, if his friends were able to travel in a few days,

and would even keep the better from being dressed, and save her a vast deal of trouble when they were next wanted, as they would only require to be warmed again.—(You ought to be informed that his Lordship's servants both in town and country are always upon board wages.)—The cook, though doubtless very grateful for the kind intention he evinced to save her any additional trouble, protested every thing was ready to be put upon the table; it would therefore be impossible to think of rewarming any thing but the ragouts and fricassees, and even they would not be improved by such an operation. This was very unfortunate, the Peer observed; he was in very great haste to see his friend; he must therefore reflect upon the matter as he rode along, and send her his final determination by his groom, admitting he did not return; repeating his orders to have every thing put by very carefully till she learned his final determination.—Having so far settled matters, he mounted his horse, and set out for the village where
his

his friends were detained, resolving to spend the time of their confinement with them; by which means he should probably live at free cost for another week, and thus indemnify himself for his late unnecessary expence.— Upon his arrival, he foresaw it was very uncertain when they would be able to accompany him home; he therefore sent back his groom, with orders to the cook to sell the dinner for what it would fetch. The woman, highly diverted that her master had afforded her so good an opportunity to expose his abominable avarice, sent word to all the neighbours that there would be a sale of various provisions the next morning at eleven o'clock at the Castle. So strange an intimation did not fail assembling a crowd at the time appointed, amongst whom were a party of Officers, quartered in a neighbouring town, whom I had persuaded to accompany me thither. The cook, rejoiced to find she was likely to have so good a sale, put her price upon the various dishes before she exposed them to public view; but upon un-

derstanding what she had been doing, we all voted for their being put up to auction, and disposed of to the best bidder, as several of us might take a fancy to the same thing. The good woman readily entered into a plan likely to increase the general mirth, and accordingly mounted a very large table in the hall, with the rolling-pin in one hand and a saucepan in the other: the various dishes were brought out one by one, and the sale went on amidst the shouts of laughter of the purchasers. I bought a pigeon-pie for seven-and-sixpence, which I ate with my brother Officers at a small alehouse in the adjoining village, to the infinite diversion of our own party, and every other person in the house; and I am convinced the auction at Castle Innham will never be forgot while it continues in the Altamont family."

Henry laughed very heartily, and declared he would willingly have rode fifty miles to have witnessed such a scene.

"I must

"I must acknowledge I have heard of this munificent Peer before to-day," said he; "indeed I have as much reason to remember the family, as his Lordship's Scotch neighbours have his auction; for a natural son of his Lordship's second son, either has or intends doing me out of a snug twelve thousand a-year in landed property, not to mention the money my aunt has in the funds. As you are acquainted with the Altamont family, you may have heard of the young man I allude to, Montague O'Brien, and of his late or intended union with Mrs. Vanderhorst, of Woodley Abbey."

"I have, Sir," replied the stranger, whose colour was considerably heightened, "and must acknowledge you would have some reason to dislike the name of O'Brien, should this young man ever persuade your aunt it is more sonorous than that of Vanderhorst."

"No, positively, I have no dislike to the name, nor any to the man, who, from your account of his grandfather, was doubtless very slenderly provided for: such a large

fortune was very tempting; he probably hopes, as I should possibly do in his place, to bury the old woman very speedily, and he may then make himself ample amends for his present state of probation."

The stranger smiled.—"You don't seem to have formed a very favourable opinion of Montague O'Brien; would you, admitting your fears respecting him to be well founded, acknowledge him as your relation?"

"Indeed I would; as I can't at all blame a man in his situation for preferring an old woman with an immense fortune, to the finest girl in Christendom without such an appendage. He will now have it in his power, let her live or die, to please his fancy, and who could censure his conduct? As for my aunt, she must be a greater fool than I ever took her to be, if she supposes she can inspire any man with love."

"Then you really would have forgiven the young soldier, even if he had robbed you of Mrs. Vanderhorst's inheritance?"

"What

“What right should I have to withhold what most likely would not give him a moment’s concern? Believe me, my father is much more disturbed about the matter than I am: I expect to find him at Woodley, endeavouring to ward off the evil day, if the match has not already taken place.”

“And you are hastening to his assistance?” said the smiling stranger.—“You have not been long in England, if I mistake not; and are nephew to Mrs. Vanderhorst, and son to her brother, Mr. Melcombe?”

“Exactly so; but I find I am conversing with a person better acquainted with the present state of my family affairs than I am myself; so pray tell me whether my old aunt is, or means to be married? or whether my father’s fears were absolutely chimerical?”

“I can assure you Mrs. Vanderhorst neither is, nor ever will be, the wife of the dreaded Montague O’Brien, he having within the last fortnight disposed of his liberty in favour of a most beautiful young widow,

nearly twice as rich as your aunt is reported to be."

"You astonish me!" cried Henry; "well, I wish the young soldier joy from the bottom of my soul!"

"I believe you speak feelingly; you had something very considerable at stake, and I must acknowledge your father had some reasons to be alarmed."

"Do you know I never felt myself in so awkward a situation," rejoined Henry; "you seem so perfectly acquainted with my aunt, my father, and this Mr. O'Brien, whom you acknowledge my aunt did either notice or distinguish, and yet he has very lately married some other widow—I am positively quite bewildered."

"You seem not less *au fait* concerning Montague O'Brien's family history. His prospects in life were far from brilliant when he arrived at Devizes; still he absolutely, though gratefully, rejected the unconditional offer of Mrs. Vanderhorst's hand, even before he had seen his present Lady."

"And

“And Heaven, according to your account, seems to have rewarded him for his disinterestedness. I am convinced he is a noble spirited fellow. I was asking myself, not long before we met, how I should have acted had I been in his situation, and had received a similar offer from a woman of my aunt’s age and fortune ; and, upon my soul, I should have rejected affluence upon such conditions. But where is Mr. O’Brien and his lovely bride, and who is she ?—I am afraid you think me very impertinent, but pray attribute my unauthorized freedom to my having imbibed too great a share of French levity.”

“There appears to me to be a similarity in our dispositions, which leads me to hope we should have become, nay have continued friends, even had I accepted Mrs. Vanderhorst’s generous offer ; for Montague O’Brien stands before you—so give me your hand.”

Henry eagerly caught it, though in evident confusion.

“ I need not have told you I was very impertinent, Mr. O’Brien, for I fancy long ere this you have made the discovery ; but will you give me credit when I assure you I almost wish your principles (much as I revere them) would have allowed you to become my uncle.”

“ They will allow me to become your friend ; therefore I hope we shall soon be better acquainted.”

“ I formed that with the moment I saw you, and must confess I never before had so high an opinion of my aunt’s discernment : but I am fearful you will think I only confess my failings to obtain absolution before I offend again ; for I must acknowledge I am still very anxious to know what gave rise to the report which made my father send for me over in such haste.”

“ I will endeavour to satisfy your curiosity.—Chance, or more properly my guardian genius, led me to take up my abode at a linen-draper’s in the market-place at Devizes ; and for want of something better

to do, I frequently lounged away an hour at a time in the shop, where I first saw your aunt, who I was soon informed was the great Madam Vanderhorst, of Woodley Abbey.— Her age and situation in life led me, during several succeeding interviews, to treat her with becoming respect, though I did not feel inclined to avail myself of the repeated invitations she gave me to her seat; nor can I at all guess what could lead her to suppose I felt any degree of partiality either for her person or fortune. Suffice it to say, in less than a month from our first interview, she honoured me with an anonymous letter, in which she kindly informed me, she perceived respect prevented me from acknowledging my sentiments in her favour; and concluded by unequivocally offering me her hand and fortune. Had she been twenty years younger, I might have taken some time for reflection; but to part with my liberty to a woman so much my senior, merely because she was very rich, and I was very poor, the bare idea was truly revolting to an independent mind;

therefore, not to keep the lady a moment in suspense, as politely as circumstances would admit, I begged leave to decline her very flattering offers; and you may believe me when I protest, had she put no other person into her confidence, no soul should ever have known of her condescension. But unfortunately the rough copy (I rather think) of her tender epistle was picked up the following day upon the parade, to which was subjoined the following explanation in another hand:—‘This sublime effusion of Mrs. Vanderhorst’s sentiments in favour of Lieutenant O’Brien having made no impression upon his callous heart, his brother Officers are requested to interfere in the love-sick lady’s behalf; and if persuasion fails, to force him into her antiquated arms.’—You may suppose I was pretty well laughed at upon the occasion, and that the offer I had received, and my barbarous refusal, which most people affected not to credit, became the general talk of the town; when, to mend the matter, Mrs. Vanderhorst, who I am convinced

convinced was not aware her generous offers had been so publicly canvassed over, chose to honour one of the public assemblies with her presence, and took such particular notice of your humble servant, that it was confidently affirmed we were upon the point of marriage: indeed she made another effort to induce me to overlook the disparity of our years, and thus forced me a second time to wound her feelings, as I thought it necessary to give her a hint of a pre-engagement, by way of putting a stop to our correspondence.— Among the many who laughed at me for rejecting such tempting offers, was my present wife:—she one day asked me, before some other company, if I should have been equally ungracious had she made me a similar offer? Her looks, and manner of speaking, emboldened me to wish she would put me to the trial: she did, and I had very soon after the supreme felicity of calling her mine. You are not acquainted with Lady Albury, as she was not returned from India when you went abroad; she now sometimes resides

resides at a beautiful seat on the other side of Devizes, from whence I came this morning, and where I shall be very happy to see you, and to introduce you to one of the most amiable women in the world."

"You do me infinite honour.—I can't exactly tell how long I shall remain at Woodley; but should you return into Wiltshire during my stay, I shall venture to remind you of your obliging offer.—I can suppose my poor aunt never was in greater need of company; her spirits must be very much depressed. What an opinion she must entertain of the magical power of gold, since she hoped her fortune would render you blind to her imperfections.—I have positively half a mind to return to London, for I know I shall not be able to look serious in her presence; though she has really behaved so generously towards me, I should be very sorry to hurt her feelings. I wish the first interview was over; fortunately I am not supposed to know she ever had any intention to alter her condition."

"Nor

“Nor is she herself, I am convinced, aware her kind intentions in my favour were so generally known; so let us hope she has ere this overcome her disappointment, and given up all thoughts of matrimony.”

“Why, as she will never meet with a second Mr. O'Brien, I fancy my father may lay aside his fears; though in good truth he is not in want of any thing she has to dispose of, for he is now worth between eight and nine thousand a-year, and is daily increasing his capital; still I know he would almost as soon see his own name in the Gazette, as my aunt's in the list of marriages. However, enough of the subject: and may I express my astonishment at your chusing to travel in such weather? How came Lady Albury to suffer you to leave home?”

“An Officer, you know, is not always allowed to study either his own convenience or his own gratification. I have received orders to join my regiment, which is now at Southampton; to oblige my wife, and that we may not be so liable to be separated
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in future, I am first going to London, to purchase into the Guards, and to dispose of my present commission ; and as all this may be a work of time, I was not at liberty to consider whether the elements favoured my plans."

At this moment the waiter entered, to enquire whether the gentlemen chose to have their dinner brought in ; and being answered in the affirmative, we will leave them to enjoy themselves, while we enter into a few more details respecting the new-married man.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

THE first ideas that occurred to Montague O'Brien, were his having been in a wooden house, surrounded with water; he was at that period an inhabitant of a farm-house, in a small village in Switzerland, situated upon the Lake of Geneva, where he had been placed by a gentleman, who regularly paid for his board, and other necessaries. As he grew up, he supposed his first habitation must have been a ship; and as he was frequently called the little Englishman, from not having been able to speak any other language when he was left in Switzerland, he presumed the ship, which ever ran in his mind, had brought him near to the place where he then was.

was. Of his mother he retained a sort of confused recollection, but had no remembrance of his father; nor did the good people with whom he boarded, know more about his origin than he did himself. Soon after he was nine years old, they received orders to conduct him to an academy at Laufanne, which they did accordingly, though not without infinite reluctance; having taken a very serious liking to him, which induced them frequently to visit him, and often to have him home during the holidays. He remained three years in this seminary, the master of which, to whom he more than once applied, always declaring he could give him no information respecting his parents. His board was paid for as regularly as before, and a stated allowance was made for his other wants;—in this, therefore, to him disagreeable state of uncertainty he seemed doomed to remain, till his parents or guardians chose to elucidate the mystery which at present hung over his birth.

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At the expiration of the before-mentioned time, when, according to the farmer's wife's calculation (who judged him to be about three years old when he was committed to her care), he had just entered his thirteenth year, he was informed he must prepare for his return to England. His heart beat with delight at the bare idea of revisiting his native country, though he was in many respects very eligibly situated, and was very much attached both to the farmer's family and his master; still he was rejoiced at the idea of seeing his relations, whom he naturally presumed were natives of Great Britain. He enquired how he was to travel, and was informed with a *voiturin*, or carrier, who generally made three or four journies to England in the course of the year, and who had received orders, when last there, to bring him over the next time he came.

When the time of his departure arrived, he felt as if quitting a certainty for the exact reverse. Those relations, whom he was so
anxious

anxious to see, might neither be so fond nor so kind to him as his Swiss friends, yet he wished to judge from experience; and readily promised the farmer's wife to return to Switzerland if he did not like England, without considering such a journey would hardly be at his own option. An unceasing flow of spirits soon reconciled him to having parted with those friends he to the present moment remembered with the most heartfelt gratitude;—as to the relations or friends he was going to join, he was still doomed to remain in ignorance of their names and situations in life; the *voiturin* had merely been informed where to bring him when they reached London; and, having received his money beforehand, he had not taken the trouble to make any further enquiries concerning his employers.

Montague was delighted when they entered London, which they chanced to do on a fine evening in spring; the number of lamps, and of gay equipages, which passed
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or met them, made him form a very high idea of his native country; and indeed his senses were wholly absorbed in admiration as he advanced. It was not till they had stopped at an inn, and exchanged their travelling carriage for a hackney coach, that he found time to reflect he was probably on the eve of being introduced to his parents, or to whomever had hitherto had the charge of him. The coach soon stopped at a small stationer's shop in ——— Street, Grosvenor Square, where Montague was welcomed by an elderly woman, who evidently expected his arrival, and with whom the *voiturin* left him, promising to call the next day to take charge of the letters he wished to send his Swiss friends. The female with whom he remained, seemed at a loss what to say to him, and he was not less puzzled to divine who she was; no relation he was pretty sure, as she had displayed no regard for him when they met, and continued to treat him with a sort of polite formality. She presumed he must be fatigued, therefore advised him to
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take an early supper, and to retire almost immediately after. He complied with her wishes, and was shewn into a neat room upon the second floor; but found himself too much chagrined and disappointed, to feel himself inclined to sleep. After forming and rejecting various plans for gratifying his curiosity, he determined to wait with patience till those who had the care of him, chose to be less mysterious. He certainly must have had a father and mother, and some time or other he should probably learn their names, admitting they were no more, which he rather supposed to be the case, else surely they would not have abandoned him so long to the care of strangers. Yet why was he sent into Switzerland? Had his parents died there, he must have heard of it; he had been told by one of his companions, in strict confidence, that his master suspected he was the natural son of some very rich man, and every thing that had occurred since his arrival in London led him to suppose such a conjecture was not ill-founded: at all events
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he resolved to ask no more questions.— Having formed this resolution, he composed himself to rest, and rose the following morning, if not in his usual spirits, more satisfied than when he went to bed. He had scarcely done breakfast, before an elderly man, whom he found was his hostess's brother, and some gentleman's servant, as he frequently mentioned his master, came to shew him about the town, and to purchase such things as he seemed most in want of, as he was to take him, as soon as he was properly equipped, to a very famous academy at some distance from London;—this fully confirmed the truth of his Swiss master's suppositions in Montague's mind, who suffered himself to be taken just where his conductor chose, and felt no reluctance to leave London in his company on the fourth morning after his arrival there. They reached Winchester early in the evening; and before he slept, he was received by the principal master, and entered upon the foundation of that excellent school, more than ever convinced, that if
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he had a father, or any other relations, they felt no wish to see him. He could not forbear asking his conductor when they parted, by whose orders he was brought thither.—“It mattered not,” was the reply; “those who had hitherto provided for him, meant to give him a good education before they made themselves known to him; all he had to do was to study very hard, and he would be answerable he would never know the want of a friend.”

This was some encouragement Montague thought, and he determined not to be deficient in diligence; let what would be his future prospects, being a good scholar would be of infinite service to him. He was already as much advanced in Latin and Greek as most of those of his own age; in addition to which, he spoke and wrote French and Italian with great accuracy. For the four succeeding years he continued his studies with unremitting attention, and never left the College except to walk about the town

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or environs with the permission of his masters. Respecting his family and future prospects, he was as ignorant as when he left Lausanne; though he rather began to think he was educating for the Church, knowing the College where he then was, would send him to the University, if his friends chose he should avail himself of the opportunity. This was not exactly the line of life he should have preferred, as there was a gaiety in his disposition he did not think very compatible with so serious a profession; however, presuming he must conform to the orders of those who had hitherto supported him, he began to look forward with some degree of anxiety, hoping each succeeding day would bring him their final resolutions concerning him.

He had just entered his seventeenth year when he was sent for to the principal inn in the town. Montague knew the waiter that came for him, who informed him as they walked along, that he had been dispatched by a gentleman who had arrived at their

house about half an hour before, alone, and on horseback.

"Was the stranger old or young?" enquired the anxious Montague.

"Neither one nor t'other," was the reply.

"Did he seem very earnest to see me?"

"He bade me make haste, and wrote your name on a card, that I might make no mistake."

O'Brien prepared himself for something extraordinary, and hardly felt the ground as he entered the inn yard. His conductor ushered him into a street parlour, where sat a gentleman, whom Montague presumed to be about forty; he was very well dressed, and apparently very proud, as he did not rise upon the youth's entrance, and even suffered him to make his bow, and request to know his commands, before he deigned to address him: but in answer to his speech, he desired him to take a chair. Having done as he was ordered, the stranger, with very little circumlocution, and still less feeling,

feeling, told him he was his natural son.—Montague felt no inclination to rush into the arms of his newly discovered parent, and was really more mortified than gratified by this certain solution of the mystery which had hitherto hung over his birth and future expectations;—it became necessary to say something; he stammered, and with a very bad grace thanked his father for all his kindness towards him, and for deigning to acknowledge him. Tears choked his utterance, and prevented him from proceeding for some time. The gentleman calmly desired him to compose himself, increasing his emotion by his own evident want of feeling. A glass of wine, which he desired him to drink, rather raised his spirits, and he felt sorry he had not the same command over his passions his father seemed blessed with; who, after a short pause, to allow him time to recover himself, enquired “whether he had ever given his future prospects a moment’s serious consideration?”

“A great many,” he replied; “he hoped

he had profited by the excellent education he had received, and was now ready to adopt whatever line of life his father wished him to pursue."

"There are but few ways of providing for a gentleman's son in your situation," observed the stranger; "for though I can boast of my origin, being second son to the Earl of Altamont, that is not precisely your case;—yet I have recently determined to acknowledge our relationship, and in consequence mean handsomely to provide for you, having hitherto heard a very good character of you from your various masters; but don't presume upon what many of my friends will be tempted to call my weak partiality in your favour. I have now a young family of my own to place in the world, and am only a second son myself, and was bred to the bar, where I have rose by my own talents and diligence; therefore, when I have set you upon your feet, you must try to make your way, as many more have done before you, by humility and submission to
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your superiors. Have you any objection to the Army?"

"None at all, Sir," eagerly answered the overjoyed Montague; as, had he been allowed to chuse, this would have been his own election.

"I am glad to find you so sensible—I am the best judge of what is proper for you—I shall immediately purchase a pair of colours for you in a marching regiment, and then leave you to make your fortune. You are a very fine figure; indeed in that respect you take after me," admiring himself in a pier glass while he spoke.

Montague was not so sensible of their resemblance in that respect, as he was convinced he was already taller than his father; yet there certainly was a family likeness very discernible in their features, though Montague was much the handsomest.

Mr. Egerton proceeded—"And let me tell you, figure is no small advantage to an Officer. As I said before, I shall now publicly acknowledge our relationship, in hopes

you will prove worthy so distinguishing a mark of my regard. Your mother is no more. In a few days I shall send for you to London, when I will introduce you to Mrs. Egerton, and my other children; I shall then have more leisure to advise you how to make the most of the opportunity I shall give you to rise in the world;—at present I am in haste—you may therefore return to school, and are henceforth at liberty to announce yourself to your friends as the *natural son* of the Honourable Charles Egerton.”—Rising, as he ceased speaking, with an air of gratified pride, he gave orders for his horse; and, putting a couple of guineas into Montague’s hand, bade him adieu; adding, “Hold yourself in readiness to obey my first summons; should you want to write to me before you receive it, here is my address,” tearing off the cover of a letter which he had in his pocket, and presenting it to his son, who waited to see him ride off; and then left the inn in a frame of mind he would have found it difficult to define.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

“AT last then,” thought he, as he slowly retraced his way back to the College, “I have seen my father, the Honourable Charles Egerton ! What pride he evinced while addressing a son he has never before deigned to notice ! I presume my birth preceded his marriage ; who was my mother, and how they came acquainted, I should like to know. I suppose I bear her name ; well, he is to provide for me, and has hitherto certainly maintained me at some degree of expence, therefore I ought not to repine ; though I had rather have been the legitimate offspring of the most petty tradesman, than the natural son of this honourable gentleman, as I am

sensible I derive no honour from our relationship. What a stress my father laid upon the word *figure*!—‘Don’t think to take advantage of my weak partiality in your favour,’ he repeated to himself.—Now, in what one instance has he displayed this very amiable weakness?—He might, I will allow, at an early age have cast me totally off; instead of which, he certainly has hitherto done his duty by me: but as for entertaining any partiality for me, he rather seems to consider me as an useless being he has encumbered himself with, and must for shame place in some line to earn his living;—however, at all events, I will shape my mind to my circumstances, and endeavour not to disgrace this honourable gentleman.”—His ideas next reverted to his brothers and sisters, whom he longed to see, though he scarcely dared hope they would acknowledge the relationship.

Montague was at this period one of the finest figures and handsomest youths in England;

England; and, though not unconscious of his external advantages, he was totally free from vanity, except what arose from having been for some time the first scholar at Winchester. Good-tempered almost to a fault, ever ready to stand forth in defence of the oppressed, as his courage fully equalled his benevolence, he was an universal favourite among his companions, and stood very high in the good graces of his masters; it may therefore be supposed he looked forward to his approaching departure with more regret than pleasure. To the head master he thought it but proper to disclose what had so recently passed between him and his father; that gentleman had ever been particularly kind to him, and now favoured him with some excellent advice, concluding by promising to recommend him to a brother he had in the Army, should he ever foresee such an introduction likely to prove advantageous to him. To his schoolfellows he was not equally communicative, not finding himself inclined to boast of his relationship

to the Earl of Altamont's second son: he therefore merely informed them he expected to leave Winchester in a very few days, but hoped he should meet all his young friends again at some future period, when he should with joy renew their former acquaintance.— Every boy in the school felt hurt when they learned the approaching departure of their favourite; and his more particular friends expressed their unfeigned regret with far more sensibility and feeling than his father had displayed during their late interview:—indeed we must acknowledge that gentleman had neither inspired him with reverence nor affection; the chilling reserve of his manners, and haughty pride of his deportment, were certainly ill calculated to encourage any sentiment resembling filial love in the bosom of his son.

Five days after their short interview, Mr. Egerton sent the expected summons, which Montague hastened to obey, to the sincere regret of every individual belonging to the College.

College. A stage-coach was of course his travelling equipage, which set him down at Charing-Cross, from whence he proceeded without delay into Lincoln's-Inn Fields, where he soon found Counsellor Egerton's habitation, and was immediately shewn into that gentleman's study. He was alone, and received him with at least a semblance of cordiality; told him he had made the promised purchase, and congratulated him upon having ascended the first step in the military ladder; as he was now an Ensign in the 22d regiment of foot, then quartered at Chelmsford in Essex, where the sooner he joined it, the better; adding, "You will want some necessary articles of dress, &c: which I mean to present you with, in addition to your commission; but don't let my present generosity mislead you—henceforward your pay must suffice for all your wants."

Montague was never so sensible that he had inherited no small share of his father's pride; and secretly resolved, while he bowed

acquiescence to his last intimation, never to ask him for one shilling in addition to the small stipend annexed to the name of Ensign. Mr. Egerton then chose to give him what he called some very useful advice, adding—
“ I have risen by my talents, as you must do in your turn; for the Earl of Altamont, though one of the first Peers in Scotland, did not bestow a large fortune upon me: to be sure, I married prudently, and I have now every prospect of a seat upon the wool-sack; therefore I may be able to leave you something worth your acceptance, if you give me no reason to alter my present intentions.—But I dare say you are curious to know who was your mother; indeed you are now at an age when you ought to be treated with confidence, and I trust I shall never have reason to repent my condescension in acknowledging our relationship.—When I was about your age, I attended my maternal uncle, Counsellor O’Brien, to Ireland: Accident, chance, or fatality, threw me frequently in the way of a fine young woman

woman of that name, distantly related to an Irish family of some rank;—suffice it to say, we were both very young, and very imprudent; the consequence of which was, she followed me to England, where she died in bringing you into the world: and as it was essentially material to my future prospects that it should not be known I had a natural child, I put you privately out to nurse, and when I thought you old enough to travel, took you myself into Switzerland. *You know how I have supported you since, and must be sensible I had a very great regard for your mother, by my treatment of her son. Many fathers of my age would have sent you to the Foundling Hospital, but I could not have reconciled myself to such an action; and I trust you will prove yourself worthy the sacrifices I have made.—But come, let me introduce you to Mrs. Egerton, and my two sons and daughter by that lady, as I am sure you will gratefully feel her very kind condescension in permitting you to become her guest.”

Montague

Montague could only bow in silence, and never felt himself less elated than when he followed his father into a very handsome drawing-room, where sat Mrs. Egerton and her children, in expectation of their new relation. A civil frigidity characterized their reception of him, the eldest son alone (who appeared about fifteen) seeming at all inclined to seek an intimacy with him; the younger, he understood in the course of the evening, was to take his place upon the foundation at Winchester for a couple of years, previous to his being removed to a military academy preparatory to his going into the Army, for which he was also intended.—The eldest, a Westminster scholar, he found was destined for the Church. His sister was rather handsome, but was too young to allow him to form any judgment of her character.—After spending a very dull evening, he retired to an upper apartment, and felt excessively happy in the reflection that he should speedily quit his father's roof to join his regiment; though to be acknowledged by his parents,

parents, had once been the summit of his ambition. The following day, accompanied by his brother Charles, the eldest of the two, he visited whatever that young man thought worthy his notice in London; and gave every order his father considered necessary for his equipment as an Officer, and was, finally, introduced to the Earl of Altamont, as his natural grandson; his father pompously detailing what he had hitherto done for him, and concluded by informing his Lordship what a handsome provision he had secured him, by presenting him with a pair of colours. The Earl declared he had been very generous, though he hardly knew whether he had not better have brought him up to some trade, without acknowledging him; however, he hoped he would not disgrace the name he had been permitted to bear; and thus dismissed him, without presenting him with one single guinea towards his equipment.—As his Lordship and his family will so frequently appear in the course of our story, and are so nearly connected with
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the one we are relating, we think it necessary to give a rather more detailed account of them than we have hitherto laid before our readers.

The present Earl was at this period but just turned of sixty; in his youth, as has been already observed, he was as celebrated for his extravagance as he was now become for his parsimony. At a very early age he married a beautiful girl of the name of O'Brien, a native of the sister kingdom, whose handsome face was her only dower. By this lady he had Viscount Irnham and the Right Honourable Charles Egerton, who were very young when they lost their mother; and, as soon as decency would permit, his Lordship, to make a second choice, married a citizen's daughter, whom accident threw in his way, and whose thirty thousand pounds was not her least attraction. By this lady he had, after they had been married some years, two daughters; and she contrived to make home so disagreeable to her
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sons-in-law, that Lord Irnham sought a refuge in the Army soon after he left Eton, and Charles was early entered at the Temple to study for the bar, under his mother's brother, Counsellor O'Brien. The former had hardly joined his regiment, before he fell violently in love with the daughter of a country apothecary, a resident in the town where he was quartered; and having easily persuaded her to accompany him to Gretna Green, not being himself turned of nineteen, gave the Earl an excellent opportunity to renounce him in due form, as a small punishment for so heinous a crime, forgetting he had fallen into the very same error himself when he gave his hand to Lord Irnham's mother. Counsellor O'Brien, who had ever been very partial to his sister's children, whom he considered as nearly deserted by their father before the Viscount's imprudent marriage had given a sort of sanction to his neglect, finding the young soldier ready to undergo any hardships, and to brave every danger to support the woman of his choice,

choice, got him exchanged into a regiment then under sailing orders for India; and having procured a few letters of recommendation for him, fitted him out as well as his scanty income would admit, and sent him off, accompanied by his wife, who would not hear of remaining in England during his absence, though her father offered to keep her till his Lordship foresaw whether he had any chance of rising in the Army, or of being able to maintain her at Calcutta with any degree of comfort to either. A thousand pounds, which had been left her by her godmother, proved of essential service to them, it may be supposed, at this period; therefore, youthful and sanguine, they gaily committed themselves to the mercy of the winds and waves, and in due time landed very safely at Calcutta. The brothers had taken a very affectionate leave of each other, and had promised to correspond regularly, and to serve each other to the utmost of their joint abilities, neither of them placing any great dependance on the Earl, who had absolutely refused

refused to see Lord Irnham before he sailed, and had quarrelled with Charles, even to forbidding him his presence, because he ventured to intercede for his brother.

Very soon after the young couple's arrival in India, Lady Irnham was delivered of a son, who consoled his fond parents for all the hardships they had undergone since their union. His Lordship, however, soon got promoted, and Fortune seemed fully inclined to make them amends for Lord Altamont's unkindness; but about a twelvemonth after the birth of her son, Lady Irnham fell into a state of languor that the physicians attributed to the warmth of the climate, but which they agreed threatened to terminate in a decline; and as the only preventative, strongly recommended her returning into her native air. Lord Irnham, who was by this time very agreeably situated, and in expectation of further promotion, could not leave India without forfeiting all hopes of procuring that independence he had abandoned his country

to obtain;—still he could not bear the idea of retaining his wife in a climate so ill agreed with her constitution; therefore, much against her will, about two years from her first landing at Calcutta, he put her and his son on board an homeward-bound Indiaman.—She would not hear of leaving her boy behind her; and his Lordship was the less averse to parting with him, as he foresaw he would be much better taken care of under his mother's eyes, than if he was left in India;—a brother Officer of the Earl's took the same opportunity to send an infant daughter to England, whose mother had died soon after her birth. To save unnecessary expence, both children were consigned to the care of one nurse, who was also to attend upon Lady Irnham. By the packet which had sailed previous to her Ladyship's embarkation, Lord Irnham had recommended her and his son in the strongest terms to his brother, who had just married a young widow with a handsome jointure, having, previous to that event, been called to the

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the bar; and as he now seemed likely to make his way in the world without much assistance, Lord Altamont had extended the olive-branch, and had been of late very busily employed in recommending him to the protection of those among the Nobility most likely to prove useful patrons;—the Counsellor, of course, informed the Earl whom he expected in England, and as he also found Lord Irnham was no longer in want of pecuniary supplies, he declared he could not be angry for ever, and should be glad to see his daughter-in-law and grandson. But the Fates had otherwise decreed; as the ship in which her Ladyship had embarked, was separated from the fleet in a violent gale of wind, and was, still more unfortunately, when within a few hours' sail of England, drove upon the coast of Normandy, where she went to pieces, and every soul on board perished. Upon the first rumour of this dreadful event, Counsellor Egerton set out for France, to ascertain the truth of it; and soon returned to add his confirmation to that already

already received at the India House; he therefore transmitted the melancholy account to Lord Irnham in the most cautious terms, softening his recital with assurances of his own irrevocable attachment, and of the Earl's unlimited forgiveness, and real sorrow for his recent loss. The Viscount bore his misfortunes like a man, though they sunk deep in his heart; and he evinced his serious regard for the unfortunate Lady Irnham by never making a second election; though he soon rose to the rank of Colonel, and was at this period, though not turned of forty, a General in the Company's service, and Governor of one of their principal forts.

During the short trip the Counsellor had taken to France, he engaged to transact some law business of consequence for a countryman resident in Normandy, whither he returned almost immediately, and was absent near four months; he took this opportunity to place his natural son in Switzerland, and had since this epoch realized a genteel

genteel fortune by his profession, and now lived in daily hopes of becoming Solicitor-General, and in due time a Judge.—Having thus brought the history of the heads of the Altamont Family down to the present moment, we will once more return to that of their spurious descendant, who, at the expiration of a week, very slenderly provided with clothes, and with barely money enough to support him in the most frugal manner till his pay became due, set out for Chelmsford, and entered upon his duty. He soon found his yearly income, even with the most rigid economy, would scarcely provide him with common necessaries, much less luxuries, or even comforts : of this his father, he was convinced, must have been sensible ; but he scorned either to murmur or complain, and made a firm resolution never to run in debt, whatever shifts he might be forced to make, to avoid so disagreeable a circumstance. At first he messed with his companions, but was soon obliged to relinquish this plan, and eat his truly frugal meals alone.

alone. His brother Officers, who guessed the cause of his secession, endeavoured to laugh him out of his squeamish notions, affirming no man could live like a gentleman without contracting debts, except they had a large independent fortune besides their Officer's pay. O'Brien's principles in that respect, however, remained unshaken; he suffered them to laugh at his want of spirit without feeling himself at all offended by their raillery, frequently retorting with infinite gaiety upon their excess of folly and dissipation, which often placed them in very disagreeable situations: and he was in general in such spirits, and always so good-tempered, that he was soon allowed to follow the bent of his own inclinations, without being exposed to impertinent animadversions upon his conduct.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

FROM the time he joined his regiment, his father seemed almost to have forgot he was in existence, never inviting him home, and seldom writing to him above once in six months, which letters Montague always duly answered, ever making the best of his situation, and never expressing any pecuniary wants. His delicacy at last made some impression upon his unfeeling parent, who got him promoted to a Lieutenancy just before the regiment was ordered to Devizes, and even sent him a twenty-pound bank-note for his immediate wants, with many promises of future protection if he continued equally

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deserving his notice. Montague had long ere this gained the esteem of all his companions, and generally made himself so many friends wherever he was in quarters, that his pay became more than sufficient for his support. His figure was very much improved, and divested of all the effeminacy which frequently characterizes young men of twenty; and an uninterrupted good state of health had braced his fine-formed limbs, while features almost too handsome for his sex, received a very great addition from the peculiarly fascinating expression of his animated countenance. It may therefore be supposed he was very much noticed by the younger part of the other sex, and frequently rallied by his brother Officers upon his conquests, while he repeatedly declared he would never think of marriage till he became a Colonel, as he foresaw he should not be able to maintain a wife upon a less income: and as he rather believed he should never overstep the rank of Captain, he thought it most probable he should remain a bachelor for life. His guardian

guardian genius had, however, otherwise decreed, as very soon after his arrival at Devizes, he made a conquest of the great Madam Vanderhorst, who had till within the last six months been looked up to as the richest and most consequential lady in that neighbourhood, having hitherto given the most splendid dinners, displayed the most plate upon her sideboard, and driven the most shewy equipage within ten miles of that place;—but, to her infinite mortification, about six months before she parted with her heart in favour of O'Brien, the widow of Sir George Albury returned from India, and took up her abode at Lenham Cottage, within six miles of the Abbey, and three of Devizes. This lady had every way the advantage of Mrs. Vanderhorst;—in the first place, she was the only daughter of a Baron Lord, and the widow of a Baronet, which gave her title and precedence—honours Mrs. Vanderhorst had long in vain coveted; in the next place, she was but just turned of eight-and-twenty, and remarkably handsome; in

addition to which, she had received a very superior education, and had always moved in the first circles both in England and India.—Her late husband had made his fortune in the East; but disdaining to chuse a partner for life from among those venal beauties who are yearly exposed to the offers of the best bidder, he obtained leave of absence from the East-India Company, and came to England in search of a wife. His own connections were of the first rank; so were the Honourable Miss Conway's:—they therefore frequently met; and as she was a first-rate *Belle*, he soon made proposals to her father, which were peculiarly acceptable; Lord St. Osyth having, from his partiality to the gaming-table, put it out of his power to give his daughter a fortune suitable either to her rank or expectations. This he candidly told the fair Miranda when he informed her of Sir George Albury's predilection in her favour, acknowledging she would particularly oblige him if she accepted that gentleman's offers. His daughter knew he spoke truth,

truth, as she had been informed he was already considerably in Sir George's debt, owing to an unfortunate run of the dice; she therefore, thinking it her duty to endeavour to save his honour, readily acceded to his wishes, and in a very short time gave her hand to the Baronet, and soon after set sail for Calcutta, where she resided during her husband's lifetime. But feeling no inclination to prolong her residence in the East after his demise, and being perfectly satisfied with the three-and-twenty thousand pounds a-year he had left her wholly at her own disposal, she rejected several very splendid offers from her late husband's brother Nabobs, and departed, as soon as decency would permit, for her native land. During her absence Lord St. Osyth had absolutely retrieved his affairs, and at the time of her return, held a very honourable and lucrative post under Government, and was therefore become, in every sense of the word, a great man.

Upon her first arrival, Lady Albury took up her abode at Bath; but as the summer advanced, she began to look about for an agreeable country retreat. St. Osyth Priory, her father's seat, which was situated in North Wales, being too retired a situation to suit her taste, and as Lenham Cottage (as it was misnamed, being one of the most superb houses in Wiltshire) happened at this period to be advertised for sale, she took a liking to its situation, and soon became the purchaser, to the infinite sorrow of Mrs. Vanderhorst, who found herself totally eclipsed by the East-Indian *Belle*. As Lady Albury saw much more company, lived in a far more elegant style, and in addition to various other equipages, drove a phaeton and four blood horses, exciting at once the admiration of the men, and the envy of the women, Mrs. Vanderhorst prognosticated the dashing widow would soon ruin herself; and by way of losing sight of this much-praised rival, she had resolved to return to town with her brother, when, during his jaunt to Bristol, she

she saw and soon loved the truly elegant O'Brien. So much was she engrossed by her passion, she even forgot Lady Albury, and that she was herself in momentary expectation of a German Lady of the first rank, who had formerly been her guest at Amsterdam, and who being equally upon a tour *incognita* in England, had sent her word she should do her a similar favour before she left Great Britain. Just as she had decided to make the handsome Lieutenant an offer of her hand and fortune, the Princess of Lindensfelt, who travelled as the Baroness Kerse, arrived at the Abbey. This lady, a Russian by birth, was the relict of a Prince of the German Empire, who had lost his life in a duel with her supposed favoured lover; be that as it may, the widow thought it prudent to leave Vienna upon his death, and spent the time of her exile under Mr. Vanderhorst's roof at Amsterdam:—but her family having more credit at both the Imperial Courts than her unfortunate husband's, her fame was soon cleared, and she returned

in triumph into Germany ; since which period report had given her many lovers, but she still remained Princess of Lindensfelt : and, by way of varying the scene, or of trying the power of her charms upon the British youths, she was come to England, and now to Woodley Abbey. She had been a very fine woman, and even at five-and-thirty bore visible remains of her former beauty ; and perhaps never looked to greater advantage than when by the side of the corpulent Mrs. Vanderhorst, whose masculine features and cadaverous complexion were very ill calculated to inspire any man with a tender passion.—As she, however, had been the Princess's confidante during her stay at Amsterdam, in return she thought it but proper to disclose her violent regard for Montague O'Brien to that lady soon after her arrival at the Abbey. Princess Lindensfelt, though ever a slave to her passions, possessed a very superior share of understanding, and was therefore highly amused by this love-tale, and very anxious to see the youthful

youthful swain who had stole the ancient widow's heart: she therefore accompanied Mrs. Vanderhorst to Devizes the following morning, purposely to gratify her curiosity. She had had many lovers, but none, she was forced to acknowledge, to be at all compared to Montague O'Brien; though she had but a very transient glimpse of him, as he left the shop almost immediately upon her entrance. Would so fine a man accept the old Dutch woman's offers? she wondered.—If he did, how cordially should she despise him! but if he did not, why then, if his mind corresponded with his person, she would make his fortune. The result of this determination was, her advising her infatuated friend and dupe to write the anonymous letter already mentioned, which she drew up, and Mrs. Vanderhorst copied. Unfortunately, she made a few blunders in the first; a second was therefore wrote, and dispatched by the Princess's gentleman out of livery, who was not known at Devizes, and who was to deliver it into Lieutenant O'Brien's own hands, and

to call again in the evening for his answer. Never did a day seem longer to any two people.—“How will O’Brien receive my generous offers?” continually asked Mrs. Vanderhorst; while her friend secretly hoped she would, though she rather dreaded (the young man’s situation considered) she would not meet with a refusal. At last the billet arrived;—Mrs. Vanderhorst was too much agitated to break the seal; the Princess snatched it from her; and with sensations bordering upon rapture, read a very well-penned and grateful, but absolute rejection of her friend’s liberal offers. Chagrined, mortified, and depressed, Mrs. Vanderhorst pronounced him in love with some young flirt, who made him thus regardless of his own interest, and wished she had first applied to his father, who would probably have forced him to comply with her wishes. The Princess smiled superciliously, while she observed such a step would have been of very little avail; as a father who left so fine a young man to exist upon the trifling pay of a Lieutenant
of

of Foot, could not feel himself much interested in his future welfare : and at all events he could not threaten to deprive him of luxuries or comforts he had never yet allowed him.—“But, my good friend, I really think you take this refusal in too literal a sense ; the youth wants more encouragement—a second letter may obtain a very different answer.—There is an Assembly at Devizes in a few days ; we will be there, and I shall be able to judge from O’Brien’s behaviour, whether you ought to address him again.”

Easily led to believe what she so much wished, Mrs. Vanderhorst suffered herself to be wholly guided by her designing friend ; who, wishing to make her an object of general ridicule, had the first copy of her tender declaration to Montague, with her additions, dropped the following day upon the parade ; and thus rendered her folly so public, it even found its way into the Bath and Bristol papers, and so alarmed her brother, that he posted back to the Abbey, to prevent what was in every body’s mouth, namely,

that Mrs. Vanderhorst was dying in love for Lieutenant O'Brien, who had first refused, but finally had accepted her noble offers. The old lady had certainly given rise to this report by her behaviour at the Assembly, and by a second still more tender epistle to the object of her adoration, which he answered, as he told Henry Melcombe, hinting a pre-engagement forced him to relinquish the honour of attending her to the altar; thus finally crushing her long-cherished hopes of bearing the name of O'Brien.

The Princess left her to brood over her misfortunes immediately after the receipt of Montague's last letter, having a plan in agitation respecting the writer she wished to properly digest before she put it into execution.—From Devizes, before he proceeded to Woodley, Mr. Melcombe, senior, wrote the hasty recal which had brought his son to England, as has been already related; and was almost sorry he had been so precipitate when he reached the Abbey, as he found his

after

sister in such low spirits, and so peevish, that he guessed she had met with some very severe mortification; and only wondered how a needy Officer could have refused to humour her folly, which he took care never to hint had come to his ears, and readily agreed to attend her to Bath for a month or six weeks, as she fancied the waters would remove the nervous complaint to which she attributed the depression of her spirits.

CHAP. V.

THIS adventure, as it may be supposed, rendered the young Lieutenant an object of general curiosity; some blamed, but more applauded his conduct. Among the latter was Lady Albury, who had hitherto never
seen

seen him to remark him, but now determined to invite him to Lenham, where all the superior Officers frequently visited. For this purpose, she drove her phaeton one morning over to Devizes, and Montague was particularly pointed out to her by his Colonel, whose favourite he had long been, and who had frequently launched forth in his praise in the young widow's presence.—Her Ladyship protested he was the finest fellow in the regiment; pronounced the old Dutch woman a person of refined taste, though uncommonly vain, even to hope her gold could purchase such a man; and took the opportunity to make some purchases at this much-admired hero's landlord's. Colonel Danby was her escort; and she had scarcely taken her seat, and signified her wants to the obsequious shopkeeper, before O'Brien came in.

“Why don't you introduce me to your favourite, Colonel?” she enquired, loud enough for Montague to hear her; who, perfectly guessing to what he owed her notice, would rather have been allowed to pass unmolested

unmolested to his own apartment;—but the ceremony once over, a few minutes sufficed to put him upon a very familiar footing with her gay Ladyship, who rallied him with infinite wit upon his late brilliant conquest, wondered at his self-denial, and prognosticated he was too disinterested to make his fortune; then seriously enquired whether he had not repented his hasty rejection of twelve thousand a-year?

Montague retorted with gaiety and spirit; acknowledged it was a tempting offer to a man in his situation, and could he have felt a proper esteem for the good lady, he might have taken time for reflection; though he was really often tempted to think she had merely wished to laugh at him.

“You fib, O’Brien, but let that pass; for has she not retired to Bath in a fit of despair? When you hear she has put a period to her existence for the sake of your bright eyes, I suppose you will allow she was in earnest. I only want to know whether
you

you would have been equally ungallant, had the lady been young and handsome?"

"I only wish," replied Montague, with a look her Ladyship could not misinterpret, "such a lady would put me to a similar trial."

"A fair challenge, my Lady," cried the Colonel.

"If I was not certain I should be deemed intolerably vain, considering Mrs. Vanderhorst could not warm the frozen heart of your favourite, I can't say what I might be tempted to do; but I must first hear his objections to the owner of Woodley Abbey."

"It would ill become me, my Lady, to criticize a person who at all events did me honour."

"Nobly said, O'Brien," interrupted Lady Albury; "I perceive your refusal of the old lady arose from principle, not from a decided aversion to matrimony, as I almost feared. But now I begin to think you would allow me *carte blanche*, shall I have the settlements drawn my own way?"

"Only

"Only give the necessary orders, my Lady, and depend upon my signing them blindfolded."

"Indeed! why you grow warm in the cause, Lieutenant!—Beware that I don't take you at your word."

"You would make me the happiest mortal under the sun," replied the animated Montague.

"Bear witness to his unguarded declarations, Colonel.—I shall certainly be tempted to put him to the trial."

"Then I will be answerable for my favourite's fulfilling his promises."

"Oh! there is a league against me, I perceive; so here is a hand for each of you, and I shall with you both a good morning."

Montague raised the one he held to his lips, while she said, "Did I, or did I not, invite you to Lenham, O'Brien?"

"Your Ladyship encourages me to hope you will not be offended should I presume to call there."

"Colonel

“Colonel Danby, bring the Lieutenant with you the next time you come,” was her reply; and Montague being now permitted to assist her in ascending her phaeton, she drove off.

As soon as she was out of sight, the Colonel accompanied him into his apartment, protesting he began to hope he had made a very favourable impression upon the handsome widow.—Montague considered all that had passed as a mere joke; observing Mrs. Vanderhorst’s chusing to overlook his want of birth and fortune, ought not to lead him to suppose Lady Albury would be equally condescending.

“At all events you shall accompany me to her cottage (as her princely mansion is styled) to-morrow; and if she gives you any encouragement to renew the subject, I must insist upon your trying your fortune. Remember the old proverb—
‘A faint heart never won a fair lady;’—so hold
yourself

yourself in readiness to set out when I dismiss the soldiers. I will lend you a horse; and remember I prognosticate it will be your own fault if you do not bear off the prize."

Montague was far less sanguine in his expectations, though he seriously meditated upon every thing that had passed as soon as he was alone, yet dared not flatter himself such a woman could be in earnest. He had often heard her mentioned by his brother Officers, and understood she gave frequent and elegant *fêtes*, to which he had hitherto never been invited; and knew it was generally supposed, if she did make a second choice, she would look above, rather than below her. To give way to hope, therefore, he thought would be truly absurd; but as he had still less to fear, he resolved to pay her one visit, determining her reception of him should regulate his future conduct.—His Colonel reminded him of his appointment upon the parade, and as soon as they were released from

from their military duty, they set out for her Ladyship's villa, which was fitted up with true eastern magnificence, and displayed at once the riches and taste of its owner.— They were ushered into an elegant library, where they were immediately joined by the mistress of the mansion, who seemed and declared herself very happy to see them. The first compliments over, Colonel Danby reverted to what had passed the day before.

“Have you not already repented your promises, O'Brien?” asked her Ladyship, in a gay tone, though in evident confusion.

“I have brought him purposely to ratify them, my Lady,” said the Colonel;— “but he will not be persuaded you were in earnest.”

“Why, did *you* really suppose I was serious, Colonel?”

“Undoubtedly, Lady Albury; and I have used my utmost endeavours to persuade O'Brien you were so; but he——”

“Is

"Is too sensible of his own inferiority," interrupted Montague, "to have ever entertained so chimerical a hope."

"Why, Colonel, this is the first *modest* Officer I ever met with; but he really makes a most awkward lover. I must have recourse to an anonymous letter after all; it will save me so much trouble."

Thus encouraged, Montague ventured to express the hopes he began to entertain.

"Why, to be candid, O'Brien, for I despise affectation, I was pleased with your character before I saw you, and still more so with your figure and conversation when we did meet; therefore, if you will accept of the trust, I will place my happiness in your keeping, and set the censures of the world at defiance.—Perhaps we ought to take a little longer time to study each other's dispositions; but as marriage is at best but a lottery, I think we stand as great a chance of a prize as those phlegmatic souls whose courtships

courtships resemble Shalum and Hilpa's ;— and by way of employing our joint friend, Colonel Danby, suppose we request him to draw up our marriage articles ?”

“ You could not have assigned me a more agreeable task, my dear Lady Albury,” replied the Colonel.—“ Yesterday I offered myself as a guarantee for O'Brien, and I will now be answerable for his making the best of husbands.—You have money enough for both, and I am convinced he will, as he so lately offered, give you absolute *carte blanche*.”

Montague's looks were far more eloquent than his words upon the occasion, though the Colonel soon left him to pour out his gratitude at the feet of his generous mistress ; who, having once made her election, did not keep her lover in unnecessary suspense, but suffered Colonel Danby to bestow her hand upon the enraptured young soldier, before it was even suspected in the neighbourhood he was her admirer.

This hasty and very unexpected marriage afforded an inexhaustible fund of conversation for the tea-tables at Devizes; but perhaps no one rejoiced more sincerely at Montague's good fortune than Mr. Melcombe, senior, who with difficulty concealed his joy while he read the information in the Bath papers.—The London ones conveyed the intelligence to the Princess of Lindensfelt, who was even more chagrined than the mortified Mrs. Vanderhorst, for this event entirely overturned the plan she had in agitation;—besides she had a particular dislike to Lady Albury, whom she had met in the Rooms at Bath, a short time before she paid her visit to Mrs. Vanderhorst, where that lady had very unintentionally attracted the attention of a young man of the first rank and fashion, who had, previous to her appearance, confined his conversation to the Princess. This was a crime that lady never could forgive; and her having dared to marry the handsome O'Brien, whom she had considered at her own disposal, rendered her the object of her
most

most cordial hatred. Had she been apprized of the intended wedding, she would have prevented it at any risk; but as it was, she could only set about forming future plans, likely to prove more successful than those she was now, much against her will, forced to relinquish.

As they had but very little to hope or fear from their relations, neither the bride nor bridegroom thought it necessary to consult them previous to their union, though each wrote to their respective fathers the day after the wedding.—Lord St. Olyth immediately answered his daughter's letter, and declared himself perfectly satisfied with her choice, promising to use his utmost interest in favour of his son-in-law, and concluding by the most parental wishes for his dear Miranda's happiness. Yet we must acknowledge he was exceedingly hurt that his daughter had made so imprudent an election; but as the deed was done, and could not be recalled, and as she was perfectly mistress
of

of her own fortune, and had, to save his reputation, early in life bestowed her hand upon a man he knew she did not like, gratitude for the past made him resolve to countenance the man of her choice, and thus give him a degree of consequence in the world he could no otherwise attain.

Montague was very agreeably surprised when his letter arrived, as he dared not flatter himself that a Peer would approve of him for a son-in-law.—Lady Albury said he had acted very wisely. She had once married to oblige him; she therefore thought she had a double right to please herself the second time, and she was happy to find he was of the same opinion, as she had much rather be upon good than bad terms with so near a relation.”

The Counsellor took rather more time for reflection; for though few men were better versed in the laws and politics of his country than the honourable Barrister, this masterly

stroke of policy of his son's (as he termed his marriage) astonished him beyond measure.

"Would to God my sons bore more resemblance to this boy in point of figure!" was his exclamation, as he laid Montague's letter upon his desk; "for 'tis to his fine-formed, well-turned limbs, and handsome countenance, he owes his good fortune."

The more he pondered upon Montague's very great luck, in captivating such a woman, the more he felt tempted to envy him. That this neglected youth, under every disadvantage of birth and circumstances, should have become a richer man than even the great Earl of Altamont himself, was a very mortifying circumstance; particularly when he considered he had been studying very hard, and pleading himself hoarse, without being able to realize a sixth part of Lady Albury's income. At all events, he thought it most prudent to keep friends with the boy, who certainly had acted with uncommon prudence,

dence, from the moment he entered the Army, and he almost wished he had made him a small allowance in addition to his pay ; but then who could have foreseen such a lad would have so soon had it in his power to return the obligation? He would consult Mrs. Egerton upon what he ought to write.—This lady was as much surprised as her husband had been, but did not hesitate (though such a proposal would never have entered her head, had Montague stood in need of her favour) in requesting the Counsellor would invite the bride and bridegroom to make their house their home whenever they visited London : nor were her congratulations upon the recent event omitted in the very friendly letter his father dispatched the second day after he had received Montague's, dated Lenham Cottage.

The young soldier was not the Counsellor's dupe ; he placed this sudden ebullition of parental affection, not to that gentleman's love for his natural son, but to his wish to stand high in the esteem of Lady Albury and

Lord St. Ofyth's son-in-law. Indeed his consequence had increased so rapidly since his marriage, that he could hardly believe he was the identical Lieutenant O'Brien who had, not many months before, sometimes felt the want of a guinea. His brother Officers had long respected and esteemed him, but even their regard visibly increased from the moment he became the husband of Lady Albury; and they were not a little chagrined when they were (in consequence of the regiment being ordered to Southampton) obliged to leave Devizes almost immediately after Montague's marriage, who easily obtained permission to remain, for a short time longer, at Lenham, where a constant round of company had hitherto scarcely allowed him time to enjoy his own reflections in a *tête-à-tête* of any length with his wife; who took an early opportunity to request he would dispose of his present commission, and purchase into the Guards, as she could not bear the idea of his continuing in a marching regiment, subject to the various inconveniences which
must

must attend even rich Officers in such corps. From the moment Montrague married, he had resolved to comply with all his wife's reasonable desires, even admitting they militated against his own inclinations; and her present request certainly proceeded from her regard for him; he therefore readily promised to oblige her, gaily observing his former companions would only think him very peaceably inclined, or that riches had enervated his mind.

A second letter from his now *kind* father was at this very moment put into O'Brien's hands, in which the Counsellor (having a presentiment, it must be supposed, that Lady Albury would not permit her husband to retain his present subaltern post in the Army) adroitly hinted, should he feel inclined to quit the Army, he should wish to have the refusal of his commission for his younger brother, then an Ensign in the 5th.

A disdainful smile, excited by this politic proposal, induced Lady Albury to remark that the Counsellor seemed to have sent him some very agreeable intelligence. He put the letter into her hands, which she had no sooner read, than she exclaimed—

“Paltry wretch! pray fling the commission in his face the first time you see him.—What a mean method has he taken to entreat a favour! I am convinced he possesses a narrow soul. Never, my dearest Montague, never, as you value my peace of mind, accept the smallest trifle from such a man.”

Smiling at her warmth, he readily promised to return the only gift he had ever received from his father, though not exactly as she desired, as he rather wished they should continue upon speaking, though he never desired they should be upon intimate terms.

“Why, it may be best,” replied her Ladyship, and thus the matter dropped.—

Nor

Nor was the subject renewed till the arrival of a letter from Colonel Danby, within ten days after his departure, to request the bridegroom would join his regiment as soon as he could possibly make it convenient, the Officer who had hitherto supplied his place, being dangerously ill. Lady Albury was convinced of the necessity of his obeying this order, which only made her more anxious for him to give up what she termed his *humble post* in the 22d: she therefore, notwithstanding the bad weather, and very unfavourable state of the roads, made no objections to his immediately setting out for London, to put matters *en train* for the meditated exchange, which he assured her he would expedite to the utmost of his power. Therefore giving him a letter to her father, whom she entreated he would visit before he paid the Counsellor a similar compliment, she suffered him to leave her *cottage* on the day our history commences, when he reached Marlborough, as has been already related.

CHAP. VI.

HAVING finished dinner, the young men had, by mutual consent, drawn nearer the fire, and were recruiting their spirits with some excellent claret and Madeira, when the landlord entered the room, and after hoping the wine was to their liking, thus proceeded :—

“The Earl of Altamont sends his compliments, Sir,” looking at O’Brien, “and if he shall not derange you, he will wait upon you for half an hour.”

This very unexpected message roused Montague from a reclining posture, and his counte-

countenance bespoke his incredulity while he said—

“This must be a mistake, landlord.—The Earl of Altamont certainly did not intend *me* such a favour—my name must have misled him.”

“I can’t think it has, Sir.—I beg pardon; but if I understood your servants right, you are son-in-law to Lord St. Osyth.”

“I had forgot—I had forgot, my good friend,” interrupted Montague, “how much my consequence has increased; so pray present my compliments to his Lordship, and inform him I shall be happy to see him.”

O’Brien’s countenance was so exact an index of his feelings, that the landlord could not conceal a smile, finding he so justly appreciated the motive of his Lordship’s intended visit. As he retired to deliver Montague’s answer, he observed, “The Earl had

not yet decided what refreshment he should order. It was too early, he thought, for dinner, and too late for his accustomed sandwich; but he rather thinks he shall take a cup of coffee after he has visited you, gentlemen," leaving the room as he concluded.

The door was scarcely closed before the two young men burst into a violent fit of laughter.

"This excess of condescension towards his *natural* grandson is truly worthy the Earl of Altamont," exclaimed Montague; "for would you believe it, Mr. Melcombe, I never saw this great man but once before, though I was in quarters for nine months within three miles of Castle Irnham, and he was down there six months of the time;—but I was not at that time *son-in-law* to Lord St. Osyth."

Before

Before Henry could reply, the door opened, and the Earl hastily advanced towards his superior in point of fortune.—Montague rose to meet him, and took his proffered hand, which had been extended from the moment of his entrance, while he exclaimed—

“My dear fellow, how happy I was when I learned you were in the house!—I really consider myself as peculiarly fortunate, as I was disappointed in my intention of calling upon you at Lenham, having been assured at Bath the Devizes road was impassable for carriages. I congratulate you most sincerely upon your recent marriage; hope you left Lady Albury well; a most charming woman, by all accounts! I guessed at the time you had your reasons for refusing the *Dutch* widow. I should have paid you my compliments sooner, only I did not wish to derange you while you were at dinner; for my own part, travelling is sure to deprive me of my appetite—a dish of tea or

coffee is the only refreshment my stomach will bear."

His Lordship made a pause to recover his breath, which afforded Montague (who felt very little gratified by his profusion of compliments) an opportunity to request he would be seated, and to hope he would do Mr. Melcombe and himself the honour of taking his coffee with them."

His Lordship readily agreed, but he would first drink joy to the new-married man. A fresh bottle of Madeira, the wine his Lordship preferred, was ordered, which he assisted to empty, as well as to finish those upon the table, devouring toasted biscuits between every glass with a degree of eagerness, which plainly evinced his late fast was the result of economy, not choice. Nor did he do less honour to a plate of toast and butter, that was brought in with the coffee, and which, but for him, would have gone out untouched; but having rather satisfied his voracious

voracious appetite, and every thing likely to gratify it being removed, he enquired which way Montague was going.

"To London for a few days," he replied, "previous to his joining his regiment at Southampton."

"Then we are bound for the same place," rejoined the Earl.—"I am in great haste; but what time do you start in the morning?"

O'Brien instantly perceived the Peer's drift, and already surfeited with his company, declared his intention of remaining a week at Marlborough, if the weather did not alter, and the roads continued so bad."

"Oh fie, Montague!" affecting great jocularity; "what, a soldier, and afraid of venturing your neck? I never mind travelling early or late, and in any weather;—nor did I ever meet with any accident, which may, to be sure, have rendered me particularly courageous."

"Very

"Very possibly, my Lord; and I may be as little afraid when I am as much accustomed to travelling in a carriage; hitherto I have generally made use of my legs upon such occasions."

"True, true; you junior Officers are obliged, I believe, to march with your regiments."

"Particularly those who can't afford to ride," rejoined O'Brien.

The Earl did not like the turn the conversation had taken, therefore reverted to his wish to see Lady Albury, and hoped that Montague would frequently look in upon him at Altamont House during his stay in London; he advised him to make the tour of the Lakes with his wife the ensuing summer; in which case he hoped they would also visit the Highlands, and make Castle Innham their home for some time.

Henry, who began to grow heartily sick of the Peer's company, and perceiving his
new

new friend was, if possible, still more weary than himself, left the room; and calling the landlord on one side, told him to procure a place for the Earl in some stage, even if he bribed a passenger to give up his birth.— Mine host took the hint, and promised to make his Lordship decamp, except, contrary to his known character, he chose to post it to town with six horses, protesting he would not send him forward with four. Henry therefore returned into the parlour, whither the landlord soon followed him, to receive orders respecting supper. Montague desired the best the larder afforded might be got ready by eleven, hoping his Lordship, if he did not go forward, would favour them with his company.

This was a temptation the Earl found it difficult to resist; “still, if the snow increased, and he should be detained at Marlborough”—(he paused) “He was infinitely obliged to his *dear* Montague; but if he could pursue his journey that evening, he believed it would be

be his most prudent plan. Though is not there a day coach from Bath to London, landlord? I think I have heard of such a conveyance; if I could secure a place in that, for stages are much the safest vehicles in such weather——”

“I know that is full, my Lord,” interrupted the landlord; “for there are five people in Marlborough who have bespoke places this very day, if there should be any to spare when it comes in.”

“But I understood your Lordship entertained no fears when travelling post?” said Montague.

“I am only fearful of being detained,” was the reply; “therefore I wish you would endeavour to procure me a place in any of the night coaches, landlord, as I must, if possible, reach London to-morrow.”

In consequence of this prudent resolution, just as an excellent supper was ready to be brought in, his Lordship was informed the Exeter Mail was at the door, and had one
vacant

vacant seat, which, after renewing his former invitation to Montague, he hastened to secure, being informed by the landlord there were three or four people at the other inn waiting for this very coach.

O'Brien and Melcombe saw him to the carriage, which he ascended amidst the sneers of all the bystanders, many of whom whispered loud enough for him to hear—

“D——n such scurvy Lords!”

His valet, whom, in his bustle he had forgotten, presented himself just as the coach was driving off, to enquire how he was to follow with the baggage.

“Well thought of, Warren,” he cried out; “could not you contrive to ride with the coachman?”

This the man peremptorily refused; and as the guard swore the mail should not be detained

detained another minute, the Peer had only time to call out—"Follow me how you can, you saucy scoundrel!" before he was out of hearing.

The friends, upon returning into their apartment, had another hearty laugh at Lord Altamont's expence, and were highly pleased when they found the landlord had bribed a gentleman's valet to step into one of the other coaches which had come up at the same time, that his Lordship might make use of the most expensive of those sort of conveyances. As for the valet, he swore he would follow him post, let his dismissal, when he reached London, be the consequence of such a step.

Though morning had taken place of the night before the young men separated, they met at an early hour, as Montague was very anxious to be in London, and advised Henry to proceed immediately to Bath, where Mrs. Vanderhorst still was, when he left home, hinting
a wish

a wish to hear how the old lady really bore her disappointment.

Henry seized the opportunity of thus entering into a correspondence with avidity, promising to write him word how he found his aunt, and whether she would ever cordially forgive him for having overlooked her charms.

“In return,” replied O’Brien, “I will endeavour to tempt you to visit Southampton, should I make any stay there.”

“Joking apart, I have an old relation in that part of England, whom I will take this opportunity of visiting, should your stay there exceed a fortnight.”

Being now informed their carriages were ready, they proceeded together to the door. Montague’s stood first to take up; therefore, after cordially shaking Henry’s hand, and repeating his wishes to hear from him in the course of a few days, he jumped into his chaise,

chaife, and was off in a few seconds; and Melcombe took the road to Bath in far better spirits than he had left London. He arrived in Great Pulteney Street, where Montague had informed him his aunt lodged, a little before five, and found her and his father at table, it being one of her invariable rules to sit down to dinner precisely at four; and she had just declared she had never made a more hearty meal, when he was announced. She was very happy to see him; nor was his father less rejoiced, though he dreaded his dropping a hint of having returned in consequence of his hasty summons; therefore gave him several looks to put him upon his guard, and *supposed* business had brought him over thus unexpectedly. Henry understood him, declaring his impatience to pay his respects to them had induced him to brave the severity of the weather.

Mrs. Vanderhorft was much obliged to him, but enquired where he had learned she was at Bath.

“ At

"At Marlborough, by mere accident," he replied; "and presumed the dreariness of the season had driven her from Woodley."

"Not absolutely," she replied; "a nervous complaint had brought her from home; but she had found such benefit from the Bath waters, that she meant to accompany her brother to London as soon as the weather broke up."

Henry professed himself highly pleased with her determination, and amused her with an account of his travels till she retired for the night; when his father gave him more in detail his reasons for sending for him home in such a hurry, and asked him if he did not think his aunt very much altered since he had last seen her.

"She is grown prodigiously stout or fat since I left England," said Henry, "and certainly is neither so cheerful, nor apparently so good-humoured as she used to be."

"She

“She generally sleeps sixteen hours out of the four-and-twenty,” rejoined the father, “and lives very high; therefore her increasing size may easily be accounted for; and her matrimonial disappointment fully accounts for the alteration in her humour;—for, faith! she had set her mind upon as fine a young fellow as ever broke bread; he has since married a dashing young widow, a neighbour of my poor sister’s, which perfectly accounts for his refusal of her withered hand; and she is so afraid of meeting the happy couple, that she won’t return to Woodley for some time;—but be sure you never drop a hint that may give her room to suppose you are acquainted with her folly.”

Henry promised to be upon his guard, mentioning where he had met O’Brien, and what had passed between them.

The merchant was excessively pleased, and advised him by all means to cultivate his acquaintance—“Under the rose though, mind me,”

me," he continued, "during the old woman's life-time ;—but such a neighbour must not be neglected, admitting he had not been so kind as to refuse the poor old soul. Lenham is a very fine seat, though I don't believe the rent-roll is so large as that belonging to Woodley ; but Lady Albury has a much larger income than your aunt :—besides, her connections are much superior ; her father, report says, has been a very gay character ; but he is now in the Ministry, and will no doubt secure a good place for his son-in-law. Lord Altamont smelt the loaves and fishes, or he would not have taken such notice of O'Brien ;—so enter into a correspondence with him immediately, that you may benefit by his good fortune ; and as you must pay your old aunt Balfour a visit, why you may as well do it while the young Officer is at Southampton, for I foresee he will be a very great man."

At last they separated for the night, and had waited breakfast near an hour beyond
Mrs.

Mrs. Vanderhorst's usual time, before they began to wonder at her non-appearance, and to make enquiries whether she was stirring. — She had not yet rung her bell, they were informed, and her woman dared not venture to disturb her. Another half hour passed away, in momentary expectation of her servant receiving the usual summons.

"I think she ought to be disturbed," said the merchant, ringing the bell, to desire her maid would do so in his name. She informed him she could not get into the room, as the night bolt was still down.

"Then knock gently at the door," said Mr. Melcombe.

She did as she was desired, but soon returned in evident alarm, to inform them that several very hard knocks had remained unnoticed; nor did she hear her mistress move.

"You

"You positively terrify me," cried the merchant.—"If we cannot enter the room in any other manner, we must force the door. Surely," in a low voice to his son, "the poor old soul has not gone off in a fit."

Henry made no reply, but followed him in silence to his aunt's apartment, whom several very hard knocks having failed to rouse, he, without any farther ceremony, put his back against the door, and forced both lock and bolt; and Mrs. Vanderhorst not resenting the intrusion, he hastened with his father to her bed-side, and found, as they were prepared to expect, she had fallen into an apoplectic fit, from which no medical aid, though the first physicians in Bath were immediately called in, could recover her. Her nephew was much more shocked than her brother, who declared he had long foreseen what would be her end, and only rejoiced, since it had pleased God to take her, she had died Mrs. Vanderhorst: her will, he knew, was at Woodley; thither therefore he pro-

ceeded the next day, in company with his son, when, to his infinite surprise, and no small mortification, he found she had constituted her nephew her sole heir and executor. However, as Woodley Abbey by this means still continued in the family, and as his son was thus amply provided for, he was the more readily reconciled to his being the richer man of the two; and the hopes he now entertained of soon seeing him represent the county in Parliament, induced him to forgive his sister for having thus made him independent. But while he is busily employed in issuing the necessary orders upon this mournful occasion, and in giving his son some excellent advice respecting the regulation of his household, we will return to the hero of our tale.

CHAP.

CHAP. VII.

MONTAGUE arrived in town late in the evening of the day on which he left Marlborough, and drove to the Royal Hotel in Pall Mall, which he had heard praised by the superior Officers in his regiment ; and though a total stranger in the metropolis, he soon found himself quite at home, in an excellent apartment, where he had only to call about him, to have every wish he could form immediately gratified. The following morning he walked across the park, to pay his respects to Lord St. Osyth, at Whitehall.— Lady Albury, it has been already mentioned, had requested he would do so previous to his visiting Counsellor Egerton, adding—

“ If my father gives you reason to be satisfied with his reception of you, treat him accordingly ; but should he give you the slightest cause to complain of him, or display any of that *hauteur* so prevalent among great men, never put it in his power to look down upon my husband a second time ; I trust he has too much sense to act thus absurdly, and shall rejoice to hear he stands high in your good graces, so pray write me an exact and impartial account of his behaviour on your first interview.”

This O'Brien frequently wished was over during his short walk.—Hitherto he had been very little among the great.—Lord St. Osyth's connections, he knew, were all of the first rank ; and his wife's partial account of her husband might have led his Lordship to form a much higher opinion of him than, he was fearful, he deserved. In the midst of these reflections he stopped at his father-in-law's door. He was at home, the porter informed him ; and upon declaring his name, he

he was instantly ushered through a crowd of very well-dressed people into his Lordship's library, who gave him a most friendly, unceremonious reception; and after reading Lady Albury's letter, he smilingly observed his daughter's choice did honour to her discernment, declaring he should be happy to introduce his son-in-law to his numerous acquaintance, greatly prejudiced in his favour, from the striking elegance of his figure, and propriety of his deportment; while Montague, very much flattered by so kind a reception, informed him what had brought him to town, and how he meant to dispose of his commission.

"Henceforward, Mr. O'Brien," said he, "remember you may always, nay, have a right to command my best services;—I will undertake to procure you a commission in the Guards; but would advise you, as your brother will probably not be able immediately to take your place in the 22d, to join that regiment for a short time, out of compliment

pliment to your former friends, though it will be very easy to get you excused, if you are averse to the measure."

"By no means, my Lord. Indeed your advice exactly coincides with my own sentiments: I shall therefore set out for Southampton as soon as possible."

"Why, I can suppose you are anxious to return to Lenham; but you mean to take a house in town, I hope, as soon as you enter upon your new duty? However, will you become my guest during your present stay in London?"

Montague politely declined this obliging offer, but readily promised to breakfast with his Lordship the following morning, as that was a time when the great man was most at leisure; and retired highly pleased with his new relation, who even felt proud of his son-in-law, and secretly determined, soon after he had left him, to exert his interest to procure him a seat in the House of Commons, as a preliminary step towards his obtaining a
Peerage,

Peerage, which would consign the name of O'Brien to oblivion. From Whitehall Montague proceeded into Lincoln's Inn Fields, where, for the first time in his life, he met with a truly paternal reception from the Counsellor, and a most friendly one from his wife, who even condescended to request he would reside at their house while he remained in town. His having, as he informed them, already declined accepting a similar invitation from Lord St. Osyth, was deemed a sufficient excuse for not becoming their inmate; he therefore proceeded to tell his father what had induced him to visit London before he joined his regiment, requesting he would accept of the commission he owed to his bounty, for his brother William.

"You are too generous, too grateful, my dear boy," exclaimed the delighted Counsellor.—"I positively merely wished to have become the purchaser, as I wrote you word. I only wish my very limited income (con-

sidering the style I am obliged to support) had permitted me to give way to the dictates of my heart in your favour when you entered the Army; however, narrow circumstances will cramp the most generous spirits. But knowing how well you can afford it, I readily accept your kind offer: your brother shall return you his thanks in person; and as I think with Lady Albury, the sooner you resign your present commission, the better, suppose I accompany you to your agent's this morning, to inform him of our arrangements."

Montague declared himself at his father's orders, observing the sooner matters were put *en train*, the sooner the business was likely to be brought to a conclusion. The Counsellor's carriage was therefore ordered, and, for the first time in his life, O'Brien was gratified with a ride in it. Messrs. ———, who were also agents to the regiment in which William Egerton then was, gave them a very polite reception; explained what forms must

must be observed, &c. &c. and Montague agreed to join and remain with his regiment till his brother could take his place, resolving to leave London for that purpose in two days at farthest. From thence the Counsellor proposed calling at Altamont House, where, very much against his will, O'Brien was in a manner forced to stop dinner, after being introduced to the Countess and her two maiden, though not very youthful, daughters, who greeted him as their nephew; and finding his stay in London likely to be so very short, invited themselves to meet him the following day in Lincoln's Inn Fields: nay, with difficulty, such a favourite was he become, did he excuse himself from spending his evening among his kind relations. Lord Altamont was in unusual spirits; he favoured his son and grandson with an account of his companions in the mail, which he pronounced to be a most commodious and expeditious conveyance, and informed them he had that very morning discharged his insolent valet, who

had actually run post all the way from Marlborough with four horses, which was certainly the most unheard-of piece of impudence a servant was ever guilty of; hinting his own haste to be in London had been occasioned by the hopes he entertained of obtaining a very pretty sinecure in one of the public offices, but unfortunately he was too late in his application; observing Lord St. Osyth had many very pretty things in his gift.

Montague no longer wondered at the excellent dinner he had been treated with, privately determining never either to forward or second any of his interested views. As soon as he returned to his hotel, he sat down to write to his wife. He had sent her from Marlborough an account of his meeting with Melcombe and Lord Altamont, by his postillions, who had returned with his horses to Lenham. He now bestowed some very animated encomiums upon her father, briefly recapitulating every thing that had passed
between

between them; acknowledging the Counsellor had never appeared to less advantage than since he had had an opportunity of drawing comparisons between him and Lord St. Osyth; He mentioned where he had dined, and how little Lord Altamont's saving plan had availed him; entreating she would direct her answer to Southampton, where he meant to bend his steps the moment *his* family would allow him to depart, and requested her to send his groom and saddle horses thither, and to believe that he would do every thing that laid in his power to hasten the moment of his return to Lenham; only wishing he could persuade her to cross the country to Southampton, when the roads became rather more passable. He also wrote to Henry Melcombe, not having been able to give him a positive direction where to address him when they parted, and to remind him of his promise to visit Southampton, where he expected to spend the ensuing six weeks, and where he rather hoped he should be able to introduce him to Lady Albury.

The following morning he was punctual to his appointment, and met with a still more kind reception from Lord St. Olyth, who desired he might frequently hear from him during his stay at Southampton, renewing his promises respecting a commission, which he hoped would fix both him and Lady Albury some part of the year in London; and would even have put off a dinner engagement to have enjoyed more of his company, if Montague had not assured him he had promised to dine in Lincoln's Inn Fields; he therefore, when he rose to depart, took his final leave for the present of his Lordship, meaning to leave London by daybreak the next morning, that he might reach Southampton before dark. Returning through the Park to his hotel, he stopped upon the parade to contemplate the Guards, who were under arms, hoping soon to be enrolled among the Officers who commanded such fine looking men, convinced those regimentals would become him infinitely more than those he was about to relinquish. He had

had not been long among the numerous spectators, before a very fine woman, in a handsome riding-habit, and a whip in her hand, placed herself by his side, and the moment she caught his eyes, exclaimed—

“ Bless me ! is it you, Mr. O’Brien ? ”

Montague bowed, saying, “ You have the advantage of me, Ma’am.”

“ Very possibly, as I was perhaps more struck with your figure when we met before, than you seem to have been with mine.”

“ And pray where did we ever meet before, Ma’am ? I wish you would assist my memory.”

“ No matter, since you have so little recollection of me ; so pray tell me when you left Devizes, and whether Mrs. Vanderhorst is likely to survive the shock your unkindness gave her ? ”

“ Are you a friend of that lady’s, and has she commissioned you to plead her cause ? ” asked Montague with an arch smile.

“ Why,

"Why, you are an absolute Goth, O'Brien. Can you put your hand upon your *flinty* heart, and solemnly declare you never, to your recollection, saw me before?"

"With safety, fair lady;" and he spoke as he felt.

"Then I must try to believe you, mortifying as it is to my feelings."

"Where can I ever have seen this woman before?" thought the astonished, and perhaps secretly flattered Montague; as she was, though no longer in the bloom of youth, a very fine figure, and there was a sort of dignified *hauteur* even in her condescension, which led him to suppose her above the middling class. She seemed to enjoy his evident embarrassment, and told him he had not answered either of the questions she had asked him.

"Will you do me the favour to repeat them, Ma'am?"

"Why then tell me how you left the old Dutch woman, and whether you mean to devote her to despair; but I wish you
would

would remember thirteen or fourteen thousand a year will not be offered you every day, handsome as you are."

"She does not know I am married," thought Montague, while he told her Mrs. Vanderhorst was gone to Bath.

"What, to try if those are Lethean waters, I suppose. But pray when did you leave Devizes? I hope you have not been obliged to dispose of your commission, to avoid the poor old woman's persecutions?"

"You wrong your friend by such a supposition. My regiment has been near three weeks at Southampton, and thither I mean to join it in the course of to-morrow; and now I really wish you would tell me how you came to be so well acquainted with me and my late adventures?"

"Some other time perhaps I may have more leisure, and be more inclined to satisfy your curiosity. You set off for Southampton to-morrow, I think you said?"

"Such is my present intention."

"Why

"Why then suppose you dine with me to-day; perhaps I may be more communicative as we become better acquainted."

"I wish I could avail myself of your politeness, but I am really otherwise engaged."

"Engaged!" she repeated.—"I find you think every woman has a design upon you. The old Dutch widow has disgusted you with the whole sex."

"Had she possessed half your charms, and a little of your vivacity, fair lady, I should indubitably have put on her chains; though, had accident afterwards introduced me to you, I should surely have repented my precipitation."

"And can so handsome a man deign to flatter any woman?" smiling tenderly upon him; "for I know you have hitherto been the *courted*, not the *courting* party; so remember I only follow the general example; but since you can't dine with me——"

"Upon my honour I wish I could accept your invitation; but I am positively engaged to meet a party of relations at my father's."

"What;

“What, he is ashamed of his past neglect of you? Well, were I in your place, I would dine at a twopenny ordinary before I would sit down to his table;—but adieu! I must be going.”

“And so you really mean to leave me in ignorance of your name—where to pay my respects to you.”

“If I thought you deserving of my confidence, I might be tempted to oblige you; but remember you have refused me the first favour I requested; so farewell!” and away she walked, peremptorily forbidding Montague to follow her, who took her at her word, rather piqued she had chosen thus to leave him in suspense. She looked back several times as she went through the Horse Guards, but he kept his ground, though really anxious to discover who she was: not a lady of the town, he was convinced. Indeed he rather thought she was a woman of some rank, to whom he had most probably been pointed out at Devizes, and who, having heard of Mrs. Vanderhorst's predilection

predilection for him, had taken this opportunity to rally him upon having made such a conquest. Well, if he never saw her again, it would not give him a moment's concern; though, should chance throw her in his way, she should not a second time leave him in such ignorance.

This was his final determination, as he entered his hotel, where he soon sat down to his toilet, and between four and five walked into Lincoln's Inn Fields, though the Counsellor had requested he would allow him to send his carriage to fetch him; but this he had peremptorily refused, not feeling himself either flattered or inclined to profit by his father's excess of politeness. The Altamont party had preceded him, and were not less happy to see him than they had been the day before. The word *natural*, according to their former acceptance of the term, appeared, in their ideas, to have become obsolete; as he was now *son*, and dear son, between every three words with his father, and not less grandsoned
over

over by the Earl. Nor were Lady Almeria nor Lady Caroline Egerton more sparing of the word nephew, when they addressed him.

The whole party, without waiting for an invitation, promised to visit Lenham in the course of the ensuing summer. They longed to be introduced to Lady Albury, and were quite enchanted with his description of her *cottage* and pleasure grounds. A few gay hints were thrown out respecting the Dutch widow, whose vanity was severely reprobated by the female part of the company. Indeed, though both Lady Almeria and Lady Caroline rather wondered Lord St. Osyth's daughter should have bestowed her hand and fortune upon their brother's illegitimate son, they both agreed, had O'Brien been in possession of a title, and ten thousand a year, he would have been absolutely irresistible.

To have judged from the appearance of the dinner, an indifferent person would

would have supposed the Counsellor had expected the Bench of Judges, instead of that heretofore *insignificant mortal*, his natural son ; and yet, magnificent as was the repast, Mrs. Egerton declared she did not pretend to treat the new-married man, who undoubtedly fared better every day at home. At last, to the infinite relief of the *hero* of this *fête*, the ladies retired, and left the gentlemen over the bottles, which were circulated very briskly till near nine o'clock, when they were summoned to coffee ; soon after which, the Earl's party, who had an engagement for the evening, took their leave, hoping to see Montague again, admitting he did leave town the following day, unanimously declaring they would not take their leave of him, to oblige him to call in Curzon Street previous to his departure.

They were no sooner gone, than he made his parting bow ; and persisted, as the evening was remarkably clear and fine, in walking to his hotel, notwithstanding his father's

father's repeated entreaties that he would wait till the carriage could be got ready, and Mrs. Egerton's friendly representations of the risk he ran of catching cold, unprovided as he was with a great coat. This latter preventative against rheums the Counsellor forced him to accept as they crossed the hall, where a servant was in waiting with the very best his master's wardrobe afforded. Nor was he suffered to mention his approaching departure, as his affectionate father would not relinquish the idea of seeing him again before he began his journey.

CHAP. VIII.

MONTAGUE had seldom or ever felt himself in higher spirits than when he walked from his father's door. The wine he had been drinking, and the gaiety of the party he had just quitted, had both had their due effect upon a disposition at all times lively in the extreme. He walked briskly forward, regardless of the road he took, and scarce knowing where he was, till he found himself entering the arch-way at the bottom of Great Queen Street; there he stopped to enquire his way into Pall Mall, at the very moment an elegant plain coach, which he had before remarked slowly following him, drew up to the

the pavement, within a few yards of where he stood. A servant jumped down, and opened the door just as Montague, having received a tolerable plain direction, was moving onwards; but curiosity to see who alighted, detained him for a few seconds: the sight of a remarkably elegant female figure repaid him, he thought, for waiting. She gave some orders to her servant, which were instantly repeated to the coachman, who immediately turned round and drove away, while his mistress walked forward under the arch-way, the footman keeping very much in the background, not to appear so curious as he really was.

Montague fauntered on, keeping the lady in view, and thinking it very singular that so well-dressed a woman should prefer walking at such an hour, and in such cold weather.— He had not, however, proceeded more than half the length of the street, before, having purposely quickened her pace, she caught hold of his arm, saying—

“ You

"You are my prisoner, Mr. O'Brien."

Montague made a sudden stop, upon recognizing the voice of the lady who had accosted him in the Park.

"Only let my chains be light, my fair enslaver, and I will submit to my fate without repining."

"They shall be formed of roses, from which I will eradicate the thorns.—Your father was not very generous, I am afraid, by your *chusing* to walk home in such weather."

"Is that so astonishing as your alighting from an elegant carriage, purposely to expose yourself to this biting wind?"

"Can't you guess what was my inducement?" pressing the arm she held.—"I am afraid you are intolerably dull, O'Brien."

He was certainly never more at a loss what to say.

"How

“How have you been amused since we parted?” she continued.—“Lord Altamont, I presume, descanted upon generosity, his Countess upon her family, your aunts upon the splendid offers they have refused, and your father upon paternal affection. He can be eloquent, I know, at times.”

“And you can be satirical, my fair companion.”

“Well, but have you taken a final leave of your amiable family, and did you separate without tears?”

“Even so, my good Lady; and you must tell me who you are, and how you became so well acquainted with me and my family, before we part?”

“Indeed!” she replied, while they stopped to let some carriages pass before they crossed into Long Acre. “And pray where are we going?” looking him full in the face under a lamp.

She was so very handsome, he began to think it would be most prudent to make

a timely retreat : still he could not resolve to leave her before he had learned who she was ; so, in answer to her question, he said—

“ Upon my honour, I hardly know where I am. I know I need not tell *you* I am almost a total stranger in London. I left Lincoln’s Inn Fields with an intention of returning into Pall-Mall ; but I am now entirely at your disposal, ready to follow wherever you lead.”

“ You really grow unfashionably polite ; but I think you told me you intend to set out for Southampton to-morrow morning.”

“ Such certainly is my intention.”

“ Then you can have no objection to going some part of the way this evening. I am going to Brentford, and shall be glad of your company so far on your road.”

“ You do me infinite honour,” replied the irresolute Montague ; “ but I have some orders to give which will prevent my setting off immediately.”

“ What,

“What, to your tailor or your sempstress? for you were not encumbered with many servants at Devizes.”

“She does not know of my recent marriage, however,” again thought Montague, determining she should remain in her present state of ignorance.

“But only tell me how long I am to wait your leisure, and where you will meet me, when you have given these *important orders*, as my carriage will be in St. James’s Street long before we are, at the rate we now proceed.”

Montague quickened his pace, though very undecided what to do. This woman had certainly some designs upon him which he could not fathom; he therefore, without absolutely acceding to her proposal, requested her to inform him where they had formerly met, and how she came to be so much *au fait* of his connexions and late love adventure.

“ You are only trying to evade my invitation, Montague O'Brien ; so suffice it to say, I have seen you too often before to-day, for my peace of mind, and that I mean to make your fortune ; but I have a reputation to lose : you run no such risk, as an amour rather gives *éclat* to your sex. Still, as I don't wish to put it in your power to boast of your *bonne fortune*, you must excuse my letting you into my family history. I have flopped thus late in London merely to enjoy your company home, and yet you hesitate whether you shall become my protector.”

“ You reside then in or near Brentford ?” asked O'Brien.

“ I do ; so dare you accompany me thither ? I am single, I give you my word of honour, and have a very large fortune at my own disposal ; but I have weightier reasons than my fear of your indiscretion, to prevent me from being more explicit.”

As

As they had now reached the end of Pall-Mall, Montague had but little time left to decide how to act. She pressed to know his final determination; observing, that all the Southampton coaches passed the Three Pigeons at Brentford, where he might be taken up without any person knowing where he had slept."

"Why then, in hopes we shall be better acquainted before morning, I will do myself the honour of accompanying you; nor will I detain you many minutes, if you will only walk gently forwards, while I step into this hotel, to give some very necessary orders."

"I shall obey your injunctions, Sir," she replied, disengaging her arm from his, and walking on while he ran into the house, and simply desired his valet to be with his carriage and other servants at the Three Pigeons, Brentford, by nine o'clock the following morning.

Without entering into any other details respecting the whys or the wherefores, and then merely exchanging the Counsellor's great coat (which he ordered to be sent into Lincoln's Inn Fields) for his own, he hastened after his female friend, who was already seated in the coach he had before remarked, which was standing near the Palace. She called to him as he advanced; he stepped in, and away they drove, but stopped, contrary to Montague's expectations, at the Pack Horse at Turnham Green, where he found an elegant supper had been bespoke, and every other preparation made for their reception.

"I had a presentiment, you find," said she, "you would favour me with your company, and I have reasons for not taking you to my own house, though I still hope to entertain you there before you are much older. In the meantime accept of this ring as a memento of my sincere attachment, and as an earnest of my future favours.

We

We will breakfast together by eight to-morrow morning, after which I shall set out for London, and you may walk forward to Brentford, where I dare say you will meet with a conveyance to pursue your journey to Southampton."

As Montague found he should be equally able to keep his servants in ignorance as to where he spent the night, he was perfectly satisfied with his companion's arrangements, but very much astonished, when he rose in the morning, to learn she had set off for London before daybreak, having left him sleeping off the unusual quantity of wine he had drank the preceding afternoon and evening, and as much in ignorance respecting who she was, as when she had first accosted him in the Park. Convinced it would be of no avail to question the people of the house, could he have done it with any degree of prudence, and not finding himself inclined to breakfast so early, he walked forward towards Brentford. He had not,

however, proceeded half a mile, before his carriage overtook him, and he drove to Staines before he breakfasted, ruminating upon his recent adventure. That the lady was a woman of rank, he did not entertain a doubt. Her conversation was also particularly amusing, still he very seriously condemned her conduct, and despised her principles, her passions appearing to be the sole regulators of her actions; though conscience forced him to acknowledge he was most to blame for having yielded to her blandishments. But the past unfortunately could not be recalled; he was therefore obliged to content himself with resolving never to let *curiosity* lead him similar lengths in future. As it was late, owing to the continued badness of the roads, when he reached Winchester, and he could not do less than visit the head master of that school, with whom he had always been a great favourite, he resolved to sleep there, and spent his evening very agreeably, listening to that gentleman's account of his former companions, and receiving the compliments

pliments of the other masters upon his recent marriage, who all sincerely rejoiced in his good fortune, which many of them (as it frequently happens) had very wisely foreseen; and early next morning he proceeded to Southampton, where he took up his quarters at the Dolphin Inn, among the superior Officers, who were all very sorry when they understood how short a stay he was likely to make among them: for though they had all looked forward to his secession from a military life as a matter of course, from the moment he married, they felt a degree of attachment for him which made them regret his having relinquished his post in their regiment.

A very well written Book
CHAP. IX.

Appr. Black ch. very good copy

THE evening after his arrival, one groom arrived from Lenham with his saddle horses, and another with a most elegant fashionable curricle, and a pair of bits of blood, as Lady Albury styled them, which she had sent him, to initiate him in the noble art of driving to an inch, she wrote him word, against she joined him at Southampton, acknowledging neither the weather nor the roads were likely to tempt him to make much use of an open carriage, yet she could not bear the idea of his being without so necessary an appendage to a man of fashion; adding—

“You

“ You have quite reconciled my father to my having married an *untitled* man, which I know; though he prudently forbore to say so, rather mortified him; however, he writes me word he is *proud of my choice*, and means to get you into Parliament, with a hundred *et ceteras*; as if he thought you could find no more agreeable occupation, than talking yourself hoarse, by opposing him and his wife colleagues, or, like one of Sir Pertinax M'Sycophant's broom-sticks, saying *aye* to all their profound schemes for the good of the nation. Your father's treatment of you, is a proof of his policy and narrow mind; he may be a good lawyer, yet I can't think him a man of understanding—we know he is not a man of feeling;—be that as it may, I shall never be so cordially inclined towards him, as you are towards Lord St. Osyth, who has many excellent qualities; his past follies have taught him prudence, which he will never suffer, like Lord Altamont, to degenerate into avarice. As

you want another servant out of livery, do seek for his discarded valet, whom I admire for his spirit, and add him to your suite.

“ I have been an absolute prisoner since your departure, and never experienced greater *ennui*. A Nabob and his deary, with whom I was acquainted at Calcutta, and whom, in an evil hour, I cursorily invited to Lenham, sent me word yesterday they meant to *favour* me with their company for a fortnight. I know curiosity to see the *bridegroom* brings them, and I am truly happy they will be disappointed; still, as I cannot decently turn them out of doors when they do come, I must postpone joining you at Southampton, till they chuse to leave me at liberty to pursue “ the devices and desires of my own heart,” which you have safe in your possession, though my body saunters about the dreary apartments at Lenham;—so pray take great care of yourself, as no dress ever became me so ill as weeds, which I therefore
hope

hope never more to assume. Write often,
and believe me

“ Affectionately your’s,

MIRANDA ALBURY.”

Montague answered this gay epistle the same evening, without, as it may be presumed, mentioning his Turnham Green adventure; but he made a serious resolution never again to disorder his senses with wine, nor to suffer himself to be drawn in to commit any more such errors, by the persuasions or flattery of the same, or any other artful woman. He was convinced there was no chance of this folly coming to his wife’s knowledge; and he was not vain enough to fancy he should often meet with similar temptations. He therefore endeavoured to banish his fair *incognita* from his memory, and assured Lady Albury he would put himself under the tuition of the best charioteer in the regiment, that he might be able, by the time she arrived, to drive her about the environs of Southampton, in her elegant present, without endangering

endangering her neck, or making her blush for his awkwardness; requesting she would favour him with her company as soon as she had got rid of her East Indians.

The following morning, upon his return from exercising the soldiers, to his infinite astonishment, as hitherto he had never received more than a couple of letters in the year, he was presented with no less than seven; he laughed as he took them from his servant, observing to some of the Officers present, he should spend a fortune in postage at this rate, and must be obliged to engage a secretary:—"Six from London, and one from Bath; and, if I am not mistaken, three of the former are from Lord Altamont; he certainly forgot himself, or was fearful two of his precious epistles should miscarry."

"I think he grows profuse," said one of the Officers; "I almost wonder he does not put his franks up to auction, as he did his dinner."

"Who

He was very much tempted to throw them all three into an excellent fire he was sitting near ; but forbore, in consideration of his not being alone : and considered the necessity he was under of answering these sincere effusions of his relations' great affection for him, as a very severe tax upon his politeness, and the only torment attending riches he had yet experienced.

The next he opened was from Lord St. Olyth; though short, it was truly friendly; and, knowing how fully his time was employed,

ployed, he was the more flattered by so convincing a proof of his esteem. His other two London letters were from his father and brother, and afforded him little more real satisfaction than those from his grandfather and aunts; he therefore hastened to open the one that bore the Bath postmark, which was, as he expected, from Henry Melcombe, in answer to the one he had written him from London, and which brought him the first intelligence of Mrs. Vanderhorst's sudden demise, and his accession (thanks, as he observed, to Mr. O'Brien's disinterestedness) to her fortune and estate.

Montague read the letter over three times before he could credit the evidence of his eyes; and would probably have perused it again, if Colonel Danby had not remarked he seemed to have some trouble to decipher that epistle.

“ On the contrary, Colonel, 'tis remarkably well written, but the news it contains astonishes me beyond measure; I can even now hardly believe it can be true,”
presenting

presenting him the letter, and desiring him to read it.

“Why, did you suppose the old lady was immortal?” enquired the Colonel, when he had concluded. “Mrs. Vanderhorst, gentlemen,” turning to the company, “has departed this life for a better; I can see nothing astonishing in so very natural an event, considering her recent disappointment.”

Montague explained, protesting her death ought not to be laid to his charge; and the Officers all agreed young Melcombe had been peculiarly fortunate, for ten to one the old woman would have committed some folly, which would have deprived him of her fortune, had she lived much longer.

Little of moment occurred during the ensuing fortnight. Lady Albury frequently wrote to her husband; like him, she had been very much surprised, and rather shocked, when she learned Mrs. Vanderhorst's death.

death ; but was not sorry they were likely to have so much more agreeable a neighbour at the Abbey. In another, she mentioned the arrival of her East India friends ; and in her last, assured him he should see her at Southampton in the course of another fortnight, *as she believed it was very imprudent to leave young husbands too much to themselves.*

Conscious guilt made Montague dread she had learned how, and with whom he had left London, as this enigmatical sentence was undecisive, and seemed intended to give him to understand more was meant than met the eye.

He had been in daily expectation of seeing, or hearing from his mysterious friend, who, he was more than ever convinced, was a woman of consequence ; as he had, (not being a judge of its value) shewn the ring she had given him to a jeweller, who had pronounced it to be an antique of great price.

He

He now, therefore, put it very carefully by, determined such a proof of his guilt should never meet his wife's eyes.

He paused over this perplexing phrase, till he flattered himself she only meant to give him a hint to be upon his guard. Still his conduct since he had been at Southampton would bear the severest scrutiny ; therefore, if she did allude to any thing, it must be to that fatal night he had passed at Turnham Green. Yet to whom, but to his fair companion and himself, was this circumstance known ?—To her servants, he reflected, and they probably resided at or near Devizes, and perhaps had divulged her folly ; in which case it would be most politic to make an open confession to Lady Albury, and throw himself upon her mercy. He however, decided to take no notice of her implied suspicions in his answer, as he was not obliged to understand her meaning.

Henry Melcombe, having put the finishing
stroke

stroke to his executorial business, and taken formal possession of the Abbey, in compliance with his promise, crossed the country to Southampton, being really anxious to cultivate the friendship of our hero, to whom he could not help thinking himself highly indebted, as he had learned he had no hopes of obtaining the hand of Lady Albury at the time he refused the late Mrs. Vanderhorst's offer to make his fortune.

Montague gave him a most friendly reception, introduced him to all the Officers in his regiment, and made him of all his parties. His time, therefore, passed so agreeably, that it was not till the fourth morning after his arrival that he talked of visiting the relation he had mentioned at Marlborough; observing, she would have reason to be offended, should he any longer defer paying her his devoirs, and requesting O'Brien would allow him to introduce him to *this* aunt, who was, perhaps, a still greater original

original than the good lady he was in mourning for.

Montague readily agreed to the proposal, enquiring where she lived.

“About four miles from hence, my father informed me; but I have the name of the village written down in my pocket-book,” turning it over while speaking; “he e it is—High Clere, upon the Lyndhurst road, four miles from Southampton.”

“Just a pleasant ride when I come off the parade,” replied O’Brien; “but pray, Harry, how often do you visit this aunt, who, it should appear, you would have been rather at a loss to find, if you had not been provided with her direction?”

“Why, not very often, I must confess; and I positively should not have crossed the country merely to pay *her* my respects now, for *you* were the magnet that drew me into Hampshire, where this good lady has lived about a year and three-quarters. I dwell the more upon this circumstance, as I never
yet

yet knew her reside half so long in any place. She was always very religiously inclined; still neither she nor my mother, whose sister she was, could ever agree. She once pitched her tent upon the borders of a lake in Cumberland, and next removed to the very extremity of Cornwall; in short, at different times she has been a resident in every county in England; and generally, when she does move, flies from north to south, or from east to west.

“ At the age of three-and-thirty, she made a conquest of a very worthy and learned field preacher, or professor of Methodism, with whom she began her rambles for the good of mankind in general. She says they met with infinite success, and were of great service to the rising generation. Now my father is mistaken enough to affirm they only spent their money, and lost their time; be that as it may, in one of the good Doctor's pious endeavours to reclaim his brethren, about four years ago, he caught a violent cold, which brought him to his grave; leaving

leaving his disconsolate widow and two daughters to lament his loss. The girls I have not seen since the youngest was an infant. The mother has not changed her quarters more than three times since her husband's death, and has lately informed my father (whom she has vainly endeavoured to make a convert to her doctrine) that she believes she is fixed for life; but this he will have it she has frequently been before: every new place is delightful for a time, and she sets about improving any house she takes (frequently at no inconsiderable expence), and has no sooner completed every thing to her mind, than she discovers a thousand faults in the situation she has chosen, and in the morals of her neighbours; therefore, for fear of being corrupted by the ungodly wretches, she immediately shifts her quarters, and places at least a hundred miles between herself and the unprincipled beings who have drove her away."

"A most curious character, in good truth," cried Montague; "but I must attend

attend my morning duty ; we will order our horses to be in readiness against my release."

This was accordingly done, and soon after twelve they set out upon their expedition.

CHAP. X.

THE weather being remarkably fine for the season, the young men, wishing to contemplate the various views this pleasant road afforded, did not hurry themselves, and had travelled about three miles when it branched off in two directions. They were dubious which to take, therefore waited till a man they had just passed, came up to them, of whom

whom they enquired which road would lead them to High Clere?"

"I am going there, gentlemen," he replied.—"This is the way; I believe I ought to know it pretty well, since I was born there, and have never been seven miles from home in my life."

"Do you know a Mrs. Balfour who resides there?" asked Henry.

"Do I know her!—do you know any body, gentlemen, that lives within twenty miles that does not know her?"

Henry smiled.—"Why, pray what has rendered the good lady so famous?"

"Why, Lord, Sir, she is the oddest body I ever heard of; if the folks would be guided by her, there would not be a fire in all High Clere the severest day in winter.—As I have a soul to be saved, she sat with her windows open in our late frost, and in summer she finds even a house too hot to hold her; so there she goes, and dines under one hedge, and drinks tea under another, she and her two daughters, and this she

calls going a Gipsying ; and sometimes they wander so far, that they are all obliged to sleep in some poor folks' hut. There certainly never was her fellow ; yet she is main good to all those who will go to her house, and help her to sing hymns, for that's the trade she drives from morning till night : and there are such strange stories told about her ; but as I says, they can't all be true. There she will talk for the hour together. My dame, who washes for her, tells me about food for the soul, and food for the mind ; and 'tis my belief she wishes she could fill her work-folks' bellies with fine speeches, for she gives them plaguy little victuals, and that of the coarsest kind. Nor does she live much better herself, though she is as fat as a porpoise ; but the poor children are as lean as the back of my hand, which is pretty bare with hard labour.— But this is my way, gentlemen ; do you keep the horse road : the long white house, as you enter the village, is Madam Balfour's, if you be going there ; but I hopes, if you should see her, you
won't

won't tell her what I have been saying about her, for I likes to live well with all my neighbours : and my old dame gets a petticoat, or some such matter, now and then for the children, when the Misses have done with them, though we can't sing psalms and whine, as some folks do, to keep well with her; but I am no hypocrite."

"So much the better, my friend," said Montague, giving him all the silver he had in his pocket. "We are obliged to you for your information, and you may depend upon our secrecy."

"She still entertains the same partiality to a rambling life, you perceive," said Henry, as they rode forward.

"I begin to hope we shall be very much edified by our visit," replied O'Brien.—"Is she rich?"

"She had twelve thousand pounds when she married; and her husband, though as mad-brained as herself, had some property. What their fury for making proselytes may

have left her, I can't pretend to ascertain; but here is the village, it should seem."

Both agreed it was a very pleasant situation, and in summer must be delightful.— Travelling, they presumed, had inspired the good lady with some degree of taste, to judge from her present habitation. They rode up to the door of the long white house, as the village clock was striking one; every thing without was in very neat order, and bespoke the opulence of the owner of the mansion. Henry dismounted; and while he was searching for a bell, there not being a knocker, Montague, in glancing his eyes over the front of the house, perceived, in the left hand parlour, owing to its having a thorough light, five people standing round a large table, apparently prepared for dinner. A tall, meagre looking man, in a suit of rusty black, and a white bush wig, at the bottom of the table, was in the very act of blessing the meat, with extended arms and uplifted eyes. At the top, with eyes lowered upon

upon the table, and hands clasped, stood Mrs. Balfour: a Naval Officer was on her right hand; and, with their backs to the windows, were her two daughters.— The prayer, or rather sermon, which preceded their meal, was of such duration, that he had time to beckon Henry to take a peep before any of the party resumed their seats.

“Going to dinner, by Jove!” cried he; “we will see what sort of food she sets before her spiritual director, for as such I consider the white-wigged gentleman;” ringing loudly at a bell he had discovered, at the moment Montague called him to survey this devout party.

A sort of cook-maid opened the door, who informed them her mistress was just that moment sitting down to dinner.

“Tell your mistress my name is Melcombe,” said Henry.

The girl was scarcely allowed to deliver her message before the pious lady exclaimed, in a masculine voice, starting up while she spoke—

“’Tis my nephew, gentlemen, my poor dear sister’s only son, the present owner of Woodley Abbey. Where is he, Anne?” bustling after the girl into the passage, while the daughters made the house ring with “’Tis my cousin Harry, my cousin Harry!” and fairly pushed by their mother, so eager were they to welcome their *rich* relation.

They were all three very plainly, nay even shabbily dressed. The mother’s rosy complexion, and sundry red pimples upon her nose, led Montague to suppose she bore some resemblance to a woodcock. The girls, one about fourteen, the other about ten, were of the true Gipsy colour, being both sun-burnt and dirty, and seemed to possess as much assurance as any of that tribe of their age. It may therefore be supposed

Henry

Henry did not avail himself of so favourable an opportunity to salute them; and as for O'Brien, he surveyed them with a sensation bordering on disgust. As soon as his aunt allowed him an opportunity, Henry introduced him as his particular friend. Mrs. Balfour, not having heard of Mrs. Vanderhorst's kind intentions in his favour, his name made no particular impression upon her, though she thought it incumbent upon her to give *her rich nephew's particular friend* a polite reception, requesting both gentlemen would walk into the parlour, and partake of her dinner;—adding, “ I know mine is a very unfashionable hour; but from Michaelmas to Lady-Day I always rise at six, of course most part of the time by candlelight; and from Lady-Day to Michaelmas I make it an hour earlier; prayers and breakfast take up two hours; the rest of the morning I devote to the education of my little girls, and the afternoons to out of door exercise, whenever the weather will permit; prayers con-

clude as they begin the day, and we are always in bed by nine in winter, and ten in summer."

: "In some respects a very rational life," thought Montague, while she continued—
"Come, gentlemen, pray join our party without any further ceremony. Captain Wilson, Mr. Cantwell, my nephew Melcombe, and Mr. O'Brien."

"Come and sit by me, cousin," called out the eldest girl.

"I always liked a soldier better than a parson," cried the youngest; "so pray come and sit near me, Sir," seizing Montague's hand, and pushing Dr. Cantwell to a greater distance.

"Betsey, for shame, my dear!" said the mother.—"You must excuse them, Mr. O'Brien; their hearts are totally free from guile; and I had rather see them run about like colts untamed, than risk perverting their morals by sending them to a public seminary: at present they are full of health
and

and spirits, and as innocent as the lambs they resemble in point of playfulness."

Montague never found it more difficult to keep his countenance; the Miss Balfours' skins formed so perfect a contrast to the snowy whiteness which generally distinguishes the fleece of a lamb, and their behaviour was particularly bold and forward.

"I shall be in better spirits by and by, Mama," cried Betsey, "if you would but give me something to eat."

"What a gut you do grow!" politely observed the sister."

"I am sure I an't half so greedy as you are, Patty," was the retort courteous, while their mother asked the new comers if they chose any soup; adding, by way of tempting them to taste it, "We had a leg of mutton for dinner yesterday, and this is the liquor it was boiled in, stewed up with some split pease. I always endeavour to make the most of every thing."

The young men each took a small plate of this *essence of meat*, and both sincerely wished they had been helped less plentifully. Besides the soup, there were the remains of the mutton hashed, or more properly sliced up in a little boiling water; and a pie, which Mrs. Balfour prognosticated they would pronounce excellent.

“It is Captain Wilson’s favourite dish,” she continued.—“I learned to make it in Cornwall; and I think when you, gentlemen, have tasted it, you will be equally partial to a parsley pie.”

“Is that all this famous dish contains, Ma’am?” asked Henry.

“Not absolutely, nephew; that is the principal ingredient, to which is added veal and cream.”

Montague felt very little inclination to taste this vaunted composition, though Captain Wilson was lavish in its praise. This gentleman, whose figure was particularly

larly athletic, and whose profession O'Brien would have supposed a security against hypocritical canting, spoke in as whining a tone as the field-preacher, and looked as sanctified as any Puritan in the suite of Oliver Cromwell; yet he soon discovered he was actually in employ, and had the command of a frigate, then lying in the Channel, which the Captain took an early opportunity of mentioning, declaring he considered himself in purgatory whenever he was on board, owing to the profaneness of his ship's crew. The Doctor believed sailors and soldiers were generally reprobates, appealing to Montague for the truth of his last assertion.

“I have always considered the former as a far better set of men than the latter,” he replied; “they have not so many opportunities of getting at strong liquors, and are in general under greater subjection than the land forces, and do their duty more cheerfully. I have frequently wished my father

had placed me in the Navy instead of the Army."

"And I wish my friends had brought me up to any profession, save the one they have in some respects forced me to adopt," exclaimed the Captain; "for should a war take place, I shall never be able to reconcile my conscience to the dire necessity of ordering my men to fire upon a set of innocent people, of whom neither they nor I can have any reason to complain."

"Then you had better resign your post to some less scrupulous man, Sir," said O'Brien.—"I only wish I could succeed you, as I should make it a point of conscience to do my duty, when called upon to exert myself in defence of my King and country; and as I should freely expose my own life, I should consider it no sin to take that of an enemy."

The pious sailor shrunk abashed from the piercing glances of the animated young soldier, and was not sorry the concluding
grace

grace put an end to the discourse. It was quite as long as the one which had preceded the repast, and procured the orator a profusion of thanks from the lady of the house, who apologized for having no wine to offer the gentlemen, but hoped they would be able to make shift with some excellent rum and brandy of *her own importing*.

“That is,” smiling while she spoke, “I bought it of some smugglers one day when upon my rambles along the coast; and it being in bladders, we contrived to bring it home under our cloaks.”

Henry, who rejoiced she had afforded him so good an opportunity to rally her a little, said he had ever considered encouraging illicit traders of any denomination as very wrong, since it was certainly defrauding Government, and of course forbid by the laws; he was therefore surprised his aunt, who was in other respects so very scrupulous, should

should even venture to drink liquors procured in such a manner."

This speech rather disconcerted the good lady; but her *director* affirmed there was no harm in purchasing what would have fallen to some other person's share, had Mrs. Balfour refused the smuggler's offer. Besides, she bought it with so good an intention, doubtless only to regale her friends, or to assist the neighbouring poor in cases which required such restoratives; he therefore saw more to applaud than blame in her conduct. Henry retorted, and was so ably seconded by Montague, who (purposely to frighten his aunt) he adroitly hinted was nearly related to a Nobleman in the Ministry, who of course assisted in making those laws she had thus flagrantly evaded, that the Captain, who did not enjoy the debate much more than Mrs. Balfour, pulled out his watch, and informed the company it was twenty minutes past two.

"Indeed!"

“Indeed!” cried the lady of the house; “then it is time to be moving.—Are you inclined to accompany us, young gentlemen? The scruples you express concerning the propriety of encouraging smuggling, which have really made a great impression upon me, lead me to hope you are both of a very serious turn for your years, in which case I can promise you an intellectual treat. If, however, you find yourselves fatigued, let me request you would make free, during my absence, with whatever my house affords.”

“Had not I better stay at home, Mama?” asked the eldest daughter.

“Patty, my dear!” was all the reply.

The young men declared their intention of immediately returning to Southampton. Mrs. Balfour hoped they were not in absolute haste, because she was really anxious they should hear her good friend, Dr. Cantwell, who was going to favour them with a short discourse, and he was not supposed to have his equal for *extempore* preaching.

ing.—The self-created divine, for he was not in holy orders, bowed very low in return for this fine compliment; and Henry asked O'Brien if he was inclined to go to Church before he went home?

“ We are not going to Church, nephew, but to a most delightful spot upon the seashore, about half a mile from hence, particularly well adapted for our purpose.— Captain Wilson means to give out the hymns; we cannot be too humble upon such occasions.”

The friends, never having heard one of these itinerant preachers, agreed to accompany the good lady, though they did not expect to be much edified by the canting bombast they generally declaim upon such occasions. They had scarcely signified their intentions, before a very loud howling, or, as Mrs. Balfour termed it, singing, proceeding from the street, assailed their ears.— Upon turning towards the window, O'Brien perceived

perceived a crowd of raggamuffins of both sexes, standing before the rails, and squalling with all their might, out of compliment to the lady of the house and their expected preacher. In about five minutes the clamour ceased, and Mrs. Balfour and her guests prepared to follow this elegant party to the place of rendezvous. By way of a great treat, and merely out of compliment to the younger part of her company, from whom she thought this excess of politeness would certainly meet with its due return, she produced a bottle of what she called cough cordial, which she always kept by her, in case any of her family, or a poor neighbour, should be troubled with the disorder she affirmed it would cure. Montague's elegant regimental jacket appearing rather airy for the season, she presented him with a bumper, observing he had the most need of any of the company to fortify himself against the cold.

The Doctor found this composition so palatable, that he requested a second glass.

“ He

“He should preach with more spirit,” he conceived: But even this hint did not procure him so well-filled a glass as she again presented to O’Brien, with “Let me request you would drink this to our better acquaintance, Sir; I will pledge you;” which she did so readily, that the young men thought this super-excellent cordial perfectly accounted for her very florid complexion and pimpled nose. They now set out for the sea-shore, the Miss Balfours running first, throwing their legs and arms about in every direction, and quarrelling whenever near enough to touch each other. That a woman of Mrs. Balfour’s turn of mind should suffer her daughters thus, in a manner, to run wild, without reflecting upon what would be the probable consequence of so mistaken a mode of education, very much astonished O’Brien, whom they both tried to induce to romp with them, by playing him and Henry various silly tricks; and their forwardness was so little checked by their mother, that Montague, more than ever disgusted with them,

them, wished himself back at Southampton more than once during the walk. To his great relief, his young tormentors were called to order upon their arrival at the place of their destination; where, exalted upon a table, furnished by one of the neighbouring cottagers, the preacher gave out his text, and began to hold forth in a most scientific manner, for the benefit of his audience, who, though few understood him, all seemed ready to worship him. One old woman in particular, who stood rather in the background, very near O'Brien and Henry, groaned with infinite fervour; and every now and then, when she thought herself unperceived, lifted a bottle, which she concealed under her cloak, to her mouth.

Henry declared she deserved credit for coming so well provided; and Montague thought each succeeding draught seemed to increase her devotion. At last, after a general squall, something similar to the one they had already heard, the learned expounder

expounder of what he himself did not understand, descended from his rostrum, and received the general thanks of the congregation.

“A collection, to be distributed among the poor in his own neighbourhood, would be far more acceptable,” whispered Henry. “Was not you delighted?” and “don’t you think Dr. Cantwell is inspired?” with “Heaven bless the dear good soul!” was bandied about on all sides, till Mrs. Balfour began to lead the way towards the village, continuing to expatiate upon the sublimity of the late discourse to several old women, who now surrounded her, among whom was the one Montague and Henry had particularly remarked, and who had been extravagant in her praise of the good Doctor.— They were proceeding up a lane, when a lady, exceedingly well dressed, rather stout, and to appearance in the meridian of life, stopped the party, and with a smile, meant to render her irresistible, lifted out an enquiry after

after Mrs. Balfour's health, and then paid her compliments all round; adding, "Do introduce me to these young gentlemen, my dear friend."

This was accordingly done; when, placing herself next the young soldier, she begged she might not keep them any longer in the cold, for she was going their way. They had scarcely got into motion again before the wind carried away one of the feathers which decorated this elegant lady's bonnet. The old woman, whose dram bottle was now consigned to her pocket, flew to recover it, and requested to have the honour of replacing it, alledging she was very expert at such things; but unfortunately, while she was thus occupied, the fumes of the gin she had been drinking, so powerfully assailed the lady's olfactory nerves, that she screamed out—

"Mercy upon me, Martha, what have you been drinking? Do stand off; I can't bear

bear you so near me. You nasty creature, is this the use you make of my bounty?"

To be so reproachfully apostrophized in so public a manner, was more than Martha could bear in silence, her natural virulence being greatly increased by the quantity of spirits she had poured down her throat during the sermon.

"Why, what do you mean, you good-for-nothing, patched up old b——. Me been drinking, God help me—me smell nasty! I am as sweet as my neighbours, I believe; I scorn your lies, Madam, I do!"

"Hold your tongue this moment, you insolent wretch!" cried the enraged *belle*.

"Who would be most fool then?" retorted Martha, snapping her fingers.—

"That for you—I defy you, mark that! I am no Papish; I confess my sins to God, and walk in his ways. I never slept with my husband's butler, nor was kicked out of doors for my pains."

"The

"The woman's mad," said the lady in a half whisper, addressed to O'Brien. "I protest she frightens me! Do go home, Martha; you don't know what you are talking about."

"None of your winking at me, Madam, I desire; I have got a clean smock to my back, and I have known the time when you could not say as much, fine as you now are. I only wish I had the stripping of you this blessed moment; if you did not turn that sweet looking young gentleman you are making up to, sick, I would give you my head for a China orange. What with your pitch plaisters to strengthen your back, your issues to preserve your complexion, and your hare-skins stitched to your shift bosom, to fill out your stays; why there never was such a nasty creature as yourself! Aye, aye, all shall out, now you have set my back up. Rot your presents, I won't accept of any thing more from you. Your money never prospered with me; but I did not live with you three years for nothing.

nothing. Madam Merton and all the world shall know of your goings on. Do you think my good Madam Balfour, who, is to be sure, an angel upon earth, sent to save poor sinners—but do you think, you old painted Jezebel, she would even look at you if she knew you as well as I do? But neither she, nor any one else, shall be kept in the dark, as they have been, take my word for it. Talk of my drinking, indeed, when you are drunk half your time yourself, when you can get either liquor or credit; and you know half your fine clothes an't paid for, nor never will be, as long as the folks will trust you. How many times have I stood to see you whiten and plaister your old face, to make yourself look two-and-twenty in the room of two-and-sixty, and to see you take out your teeth at night, and put them in again in the morning; and have not I scores and scores of times cut your grey hairs, and put on your wig? Ha! answer me that. Aye, you had better have let Martha alone. I can

I can tell you; you have only been pulling an old house about your ears."

It was become next to an impossibility for any one present to look serious, nor could any thing but the stern looks of Mrs. Balfour have silenced Martha; who, having thus vented her spleen, got close to Henry (*Madam* Merton having quitted her post near Montague, who was hanging upon his arm), and declared she defied the old Jezabel to deny one word of what she had said.—“She has been two years at High Clere,” she continued; “but nobody besides me knows who she really is; and I was fool enough to father all her lies, because I had lived with her about a year before she came to this beautiful village as she calls it, where I was born and bred, please your Honour. Well, there she has told folks that all her relations are Lords and Ladies, and I can’t tell you how many more rodomontades, when she was only a poor Parson’s daughter; though it is true a very rich gentleman

ALTAMONT FAMILY.

did marry her, more fool he for his pains ; but he, as I told her to her face, caught her with his butler, and turned her out to shift for herself ; so then she turned Papist, just to serve her own ends ;—out upon such vile old cats, I say ! I brought her into this village, and I will make it too hot to hold her much longer ;—me drink, forsooth ! a likely story truly ! except indeed now and then a drop of Madam Balfour's cough medicine, God bless her, for which I procure her in return some special good Hollands : aye, she is a worthy Christian ; I only wish I was as sure of salvation."

Their arrival at the white mansion put a stop to the old woman's volubility, who, at parting, whispered Montague,—“ Don't let the old cat flummer you over, for take my word for it, she will make an attempt upon you. Bless you, her old chops run with water whenever she catches sight of a handsome man."

Notwith-

Notwithstanding what had passed, Mrs. Balfour asked the truly crest-fallen *belle* to stop and take a cup of tea; but she was unable to raise her eyes, or even her voice, to a sufficient pitch to have her negative understood. Her evident confusion made Martha dance for joy; and the whole congregation were upon the broad grin, when, according to their pastor's orders, "they departed in peace."

Mrs. Balfour took but little notice of the recent scene, merely observing Martha had been drinking, and that she should take an opportunity of expressing her disapprobation of her conduct when she was sober. She then repeated her thanks to Dr. Contwell and the Captain, appealing to the young men, who, she was convinced, must have been very much edified. This they did not precisely acknowledge; nor could Montague forbear giving the Naval Officer a few hints, that he might better employ his time than in performing the office of clerk to an

itinerant fanatic. They then, declining Mrs. Balfour's invitation to tea, set out upon their return; and laughed heartily the moment they were out of hearing, both declaring they would with pleasure ride fifty miles, to enjoy such another scene.

But while in the height of their mirth, as Henry, who had preceded O'Brien for that purpose, was holding a gate for him to go through, his horse, frightened by a cow putting her head over a hedge, started so suddenly, that he with difficulty kept his seat, and thought himself fortunate in escaping with only a slight bruise upon his knee, which came rather too much in contact with the gate post. This little accident, which might have proved of a very serious nature, rather checked their gaiety; but a ridiculous remark of Henry's, respecting the discomfited *belle*, renewed their laughter to such a degree, that they with difficulty recovered their gravity when they entered the town, and reached the Dolphin, just as
their

their usual dinner party were assembling, which the apology for a meal they had taken at High Clere did not prevent their joining. They mentioned where they had been, and how well they had been entertained ; neither forgetting *Madam* Merton, nor the affronted Martha.

The Officers all laughed so immoderately at the latter adventure, that they protested Montague and Henry had told it during dinner on purpose to spoil their appetite. — Captain Wilson was generally known, and generally despised ; his connections perfectly accounted for his present rank ; but as they could not also give him courage, it was supposed his *scruples of conscience* would certainly induce him to resign, should a war break out, except indeed he exchanged his present post for that of Chaplain ; and then, except his ship's crew were as fanatic as himself, he would stand a chance of being tossed in a blanket for preaching unsound doctrine. Several of the Officers wished

they had been present when he gave out the hymns, declaring, in that case, he should have undergone that discipline upon the beach.

Montague acknowledged he thought he deserved it; and Henry protested, even at the risk of his aunt's eternal displeasure, he would have assisted in inflicting the punishment.

CHAP.

CHAP. XI.

THE next morning, as the young soldier and his friend were returning from some adjacent fields, where the regiments, quartered in the town, were always mustered and exercised, Montague perceived that Henry limped a little, which reminded him of his narrow escape the night before. He therefore enquired whether he did not experience some inconvenience from the cow's fit of curiosity? Henry acknowledged his knee was rather painful, and a good deal bruised.

"Then why not have had some advice last night?" rejoined Montague.

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"Because

“ Because I am convinced a little opodeldoc will complete the cure, without having recourse to a surgeon.”

“ Then let us step into the first apothecary’s shop we see, to procure the nostrum,” said Montague.

There was one in sight; thither therefore they proceeded. A very pretty young woman opened the door;—they enquired for the master, who was not at home; but his wife, whom they were addressing, assured them she could serve them just as well as if he was in the way.

Henry related his case, and mentioned opodeldoc as a likely thing to remove the stiffness; she recommended another mixture as preferable, and seemed to understand her business so well, that the young men complimented her upon her skill.

She retorted with so much pleasantry,
that

that they lounged away half an hour in her shop, and would have stopped longer if she had not advised her patient to make use of the emulsion she had been preparing as soon as possible. They therefore returned to their inn for that purpose ; when some of the Officers, whom they met upon the stairs, made the same remark respecting Henry's movements that Montague had done some little time before, enquiring what had befallen him. He mentioned his accident, and where he had purchased what he hoped would remove the inconvenience.

“ I should have thought Mrs. Bark's fine eyes would have performed the cure, without having recourse to her medical skill,” said the Major ; “ or did O'Brien engross all her attention ? for we have been assured she is a very great judge, as well as an admirer of beauty in our sex.”

“ Then, however I may have excited her pity, I certainly came in for no share of

her admiration," replied Henry.—"Is she a woman of reputation?"

"To the best of my knowledge," said the Major; "the Officers of the Regiment we have replaced, found infinite amusement, we have been informed, in making her husband, a poor weak-brained fellow, very jealous, by continually and publicly toasting his wife, who is called the *belle* of Southampton; whether they carried their love of mischief any farther, is best known to themselves."

"At all events I think their conduct very blameable," said Montague; "as, though it might both have flattered and given celebrity to a woman of rank and fashion, it was exactly calculated to rob this low-born *belle* of her reputation, and probably to make her miserable for life."

His brother Officers agreed he was in the right; and probably Mrs. Bark would never again have been mentioned by any of the party, if O'Brien and Henry had not,
a few

a few days after their visit to her, chanced to remark a very handsome tortoiseshell cat, which sat washing her face upon the steps before the apothecary's door; and had scarcely expressed their admiration of the animal, before a beautiful little spaniel, belonging to the former gentleman, a gift of Lady Albury's, which had a very great antipathy to cats, ran up the steps, and began to worry the poor creature. The shop door was almost instantaneously opened by her fair mistress; and Montague, notwithstanding he had immediately called off his dog, thought it necessary to make some apologies for his rudeness.

Puss not having received any hurt, his excuses were cheerfully accepted, and they once more entered into familiar discourse. She hoped Henry's knee was quite well.— It was infinitely better, he said, yet he must trouble her to prepare him another bottle; he was coming to give the order, when his

friend's dog alarmed her for the safety of her pet.

They soon took their leave ; and Henry observed the husband's jealousy did not seem to keep him much at home.

“ His profession probably obliges him to be very much out,” said Montague ; “ I only hope you don't mean to take advantage of his absence to renew your visits.”

“ You seem to have such a fellow-feeling for this poor man, I am half tempted to believe you are acquainted with the symptoms of his disorder, else I must be intolerably vain ; but jealousy makes men act very differently. In me it would be a stimulus to render myself more deserving of my wife's love.”

“ But Mr. Bark's green-eyed monster may tempt him to render himself the object of his helpmate's hatred ; however, if you can't greatly increase his felicity, don't,
3 by

by increasing his suspicions, render her more miserable."

Henry agreed that would be acting wrong; but declared he entertained too high an opinion of the fair lady's discretion, to believe she would put it in his or any man's power to realize her husband's suspicions.

Montague hoped not, and reverted to some other subject; but the following morning he could not help remarking that Henry was not, as usual, among the spectators during the time the troops were exercising: still, as he found him at the inn when he went home, he did not chuse to notice his absence. The next day Melcombe had letters to write, which again prevented his attendance; and, as he slipped away on the third, after having just shewn himself upon the parade, Montague resolved to discover whether his suspicions were well or ill founded, by calling at the apothecary's before he returned to the Dolphin

Qwing

Owing to a sudden shower, the troops were dismissed sooner than usual, which he thought, considering what he had in agitation, a very fortunate circumstance. A few minutes brought him to Mr. Bark's door; he ascended the steps to the shop, which he perceived was deserted; therefore, after previously stamping his feet, to get rid of some of the dirt that adhered to his shoes, there being no scraper, he walked in, and gave a rap upon the counter. He heard a sort of bustle in the inner room when he entered; but in a few seconds, a curtain, belonging to a glass door which led into the parlour, was put by, and Mrs. Bark, after thus reconnoitering her customer, opened the door, saying—

“ Oh! is it you, Captain ?”

Her evident confusion increasing O'Brien's curiosity, he stepped hastily towards her, and through an open window facing him, which looked into a long narrow garden,

garden, he caught a glimpse of a man in the action of clearing the wall. The mere glance he had of his dress convinced him it was Henry, who had taken this lover's leap into an unfrequented back lane.

Mrs. Bark, scarcely sensible of what she said or did, asked him if he would not walk in, and sit down till the shower was over.

He would avail himself, he said, of her kind offer, taking a chair, though he was fearful his coming in had deranged her.

“Oh dear! not at all, Sir. La! how it does rain!”

“Very fast indeed, Ma'am; but you have not enquired after your patient; indeed I rather hoped to have found him here;—but I am afraid you stand in need of a physician yourself; your colour varies every moment, and you seem quite out of breath.”

“Why, what fancies have you got in your head this morning, Captain? But I took

took you for my husband, you must know ; he always, in dirty weather, stamps his feet upon the steps before he comes in."

"Does he, Ma'am?" replied Montague, with an arch look, which was not lost upon the lady. "I will never then alarm you so again, through my fears of dirtying your house."

"Bless me, Sir! I did not mean to say I was alarmed ; I was putting on my cap when you came in, and not having fastened the outward door, I was a little flurried at hearing somebody in the shop."

"Considering who you took me for, Ma'am, it was very natural ; I only hope you will excuse my intrusion, though I am convinced I could not have arrived more *mal-à-propos*," rising to take his leave.

"I hope, Captain, I did not say anything to offend you ; I am sure nothing was farther from my intention. Pray sit still ; but to be ~~very~~ honest with you, Mr. Bark is prodigiously jealous ; I am therefore terrified

rified to death if any body is with me when he comes home."

"Now you have perfectly accounted for the visible fright with which you first accosted me, as I chanced to see a young gentleman in mourning clear that wall while you were speaking to me."

"Then, for God's sake, Captain——"

At that moment they heard a horse stop at the door; and in a few seconds a stamping, similar to what O'Brien had made, resounded upon the steps.

"This is indeed my husband!" cried the terrified wife; "fly, for Heaven's sake, my dear Sir, or I am an undone woman!"

Montague, perfectly sensible her alarm was real, and undoubtedly well founded, very unwilling besides that her reputation should suffer upon his account, leaped out of the window, and flew down the garden with a rapidity suited to the pressure of the moment;

moment; and putting his hand upon the wall, gave a spring, which would have conveyed him out of sight in another second, had the building he trusted to been less ancient; as it was, he levelled a part of it to the ground in the attempt, and was unable to preserve himself from falling under the rubbish.

An old woman, who was at work in an adjoining field, bawled out—"How many more, I wonder! this is the second within these five minutes."

He was but very slightly hurt by his fall; therefore soon recovered his legs, and had half a mind to have silenced the old woman by a small bribe. However, as all he could say, he reflected, would only impeach a red coat, and as many of his brother Officers would wish to be thought the hero of such an adventure, he rejected the idea, and hastened towards a turning which he knew led into the

the town, wondering what the apothecary would think when he perceived the breach he had made, and endeavouring to shake and brush off some of the dust with which he was nearly covered.

While thus employed, he heard somebody running after him, and before he had time to turn his head, he received a very severe stroke across the shoulders. Excessively enraged by this unexpected salute, he instantly drew his sword, and turned upon his assailant, who retreated in evident dismay from the glittering weapon, till his back encountering a wall, forced him to stop; though his increasing terror so completely incapacitated him from defending himself, his weapon, a long thonged horse-whip, dropped from his hand, and could he have closed his mouth, he would have begged for mercy.

“Scoundrel!” cried the exasperated Montague,

Montague, "who are you? and how dare you assault me in so cowardly a manner?"

The apothecary, for such he was, in vain endeavoured to articulate his wrongs, when the old woman, already mentioned, came bustling towards them, exclaiming—"For God's sake, don't kill him! What, was it not enough, you young rogue! to knock this good gentleman's wall down, but you must also murder him?"

"I have a vast fancy to cut your tongue out, you old hag!" said O'Brien; "what have you told this courageous fellow, or who is he?"

"Who is he?—You know that, you young scape-grace, as well as I can tell you; and he will have reason to remember you for one while. I wonder how any woman, who has got a sober well-bespoken husband, like Mr. Bark, can have any thing to say to such rakish boys as you!"

"I never saw the gentleman before, Sarah,"

Sarah," stammered out the affrighted apothecary; "are you sure you are right?"

"Why, only look at his dirty knees, and the mortar upon his jacket; and there was just such another tumbled over your wall only a few minutes before; he shook it, I suppose, and this one brought it down;—let him contradict me if he dare."

O'Brien having lowered his sword during this parley, Mr. Bark very submissively enquired how he came to throw his wall down.

"It was your d——d rotten old wall that threw me down," replied Montague; "but depend upon it you shall pay pretty dearly for so grossly assaulting me, because that old wretch told you a parcel of lies. As I was passing your door, my dog pursued a cat into your house; I followed him in to prevent his doing any mischief, but your wife chose to deny his having entered;—resolved to find him, I determined to seek him in your garden, and there I found him, which is a convincing proof that

that your wife wished to secrete him ; she has therefore rendered herself liable to a prosecution as well as yourself."

" There certainly was a dog in my shop when I came home," said the bewildered apothecary ; " but as I have a soul to be saved, I did not know who he belonged to."

" It was mine, Sir ; and not chusing to return through your filthy shop, for I abhor the smell of drugs, having found him, I meant to have stepped over your garden-wall, which fell with me, and frightened my poor dog to such a degree, I heard him run howling back again, which, I suppose, occasioned your seeing him."

" Most likely, Sir ; I am sure I am shocked to death I attacked you before I heard what induced you to jump over my wall. But my wife alone is to blame ; she ought not, even in fun, to have detained your dog ; and certainly ought to have explained the matter to me before she suffered me to run out in pursuit of you."

Montague's

Montague's sword was still in his hand, though the point was upon the ground; but as he kept twirling it round, it glittered in Bark's eyes, and perhaps rendered him more easy of belief than he would otherwise have been: but he was fully aware of the consequence of questioning an Officer's veracity.

The old woman was more incredulous.—
“Pray, Mr. Red-coat,” said she, “who was the other young fellow that I saw in black? Was he running after a dog or a bitch?”

“Why, since it is necessary you should know, I will condescend to inform you: it was a friend of mine who preceded me into Mr. Bark's, in pursuit of my dog, and who, out of mere joke, set me the example I had nearly lost my life in following.”

“Get along, you mischief-making, good-for-nothing old b——!” cried the apothecary, prudently resolving to credit every thing O'Brien advanced; “I should not
have

have struck this gentleman but for your scandalous lies; I wish with all my soul the wall had fallen upon you instead of him;—but I hope you are not much hurt, Sir.”

Very slightly, Montague informed him; but suffered himself to be prevailed upon to return home with Bark, that he might brush off a little of the superfluous dirt and dust he had picked up, before he went to his quarters; and that he might give the wife a few hints, which might prove of service to her, if properly enlarged upon.

They therefore walked back to the unfortunate breach, where, looking about for his master, whom he had lost in the confusion that Bark's return had occasioned, stood Montague's spaniel, who now bounded towards him, in ecstasies at having found him. This was such a confirmation of the story the apothecary had been in a manner forced to believe, that he called, in rather a softer accent,

accident, to Jane, for the key of the garden door, to let the gentleman in.

Jane soon made her appearance, pale and in tears.—“No more of your silly jokes, Madam,” said the surly husband, as he entered, while Montague told her he had condescended to inform Mr. Bark why he had attempted to jump over his wall; adding, “If you had not denied seeing my dog,” looking at Rover, who kept dancing round him, “who, you know, pursued a tortoise-shell cat into your house, neither my friend nor I should have rushed so rudely into your garden in search of him, much less have endangered our necks by trusting to your old tottering wall.”

Mrs. Bark understood his hint, and improved upon it so successfully, that the husband overwhelmed Montague with excuses, who, in return, promised (since they both seemed so sensible of their folly) neither to prosecute the husband for an assault,

nor the wife for denying having seen his spaniel. Bark would perform the part of his valet-de-chambre, swearing he would have the remainder of his old wall knocked down, and a new one built, to prevent any similar accidents. At last Montague was permitted to take his leave, having refused, notwithstanding Bark's earnest entreaties, to drink a tumbler of spruce beer, which the apothecary affirmed was a certain cure for inward bruises.

Upon joining Henry, he began to accuse him of having drawn him into his recent scrape. In vain would the young merchant have denied having preceded him over Bark's wall; he was obliged to confess that his fair *doctress* had hurried him off upon the supposed return of her husband; and, though he agreed O'Brien had been very severely punished for his curiosity, he thought he rather deserved what he met with, for purposely *déranging* his *tête-à-tête*.

Montague,

Montague, on the contrary, insisted he had laid him under a very great obligation, having, by his premature alarm, and ready invention, effectually screened him from Bark's revenge, and perhaps preserved the lady's reputation. Henry subscribed to the truth of what he said, and both enjoyed a hearty laugh at the poor apothecary's expence.

The adventure, however, became publicly known before the evening, the old woman having related it, with various additions, to whomever would give her the hearing ; and Montague's figure, age, and above all, his dog, rendered it impossible to mistake the hero of her tale, who was very much rallied by his brother Officers upon his speedy conquest. But Henry took all the blame upon himself, alledging, as O'Brien had told the apothecary, that Rover had run into the shop after the *lady's* cat, and he, having pursued him in, by way of punishing Mrs. Bark for denying having seen him, had

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jumped

jumped over her wall, which had induced his friend to do the same ; unfortunately he had not been equally successful, but the most censorious of Mrs Bark's enemies must allow he had not been long enough in the house to have given the most jealous husband any room for uneasiness : and thus the matter passed off, both the young men having resolved, by way of avoiding any future scandalous tales, never to repeat their visits to the *belle* of Southampton.

CHAP. XII.

ON the Thursday following this event, those Officers belonging to the 22d, who could be spared from their duty, were going to Newport, in the Isle of Wight, to a ball and supper, which the 17th, then in quarters there, gave upon their account, in return for the very polite treatment they had met with from the former regiment, during their march into the North. The invitation had been of some standing, and few were more particularly invited than the now courted O'Brien; to secure whose attendance, Henry had also received a card, expressing a hope that he would accompany his friend to the intended gala. Neither were

at all inclined to refuse taking what promised to prove a very agreeable excursion, both of them having a great desire to visit the little island.

The Officers intended to go in a body on the appointed day, dining together at one of the principal inns, and then dressing for their evening's amusement. They were of necessity to return early the following morning. Montague therefore thought if he and Henry did not start before eleven o'clock, the time agreed upon, and then went down the river in the large sailing boat, which had been engaged for the occasion, they should not have much time to look about them. A small boat always sailed with the bags the moment the mail from London arrived at Southampton; and as that frequently conveyed passengers to the island, he proposed to Henry crossing in it as a far more expeditious mode of conveyance, not to mention the time they should gain by starting thus early. Henry enjoyed the notion,

motion, and thus therefore it was settled. Their valets received orders to come over with the body of Officers (who were told of their intention the preceding night), and to bring what baggage they foresaw might be wanted: and at the appointed time they embarked in the boat which conveyed the bags, with another passenger, who proved a remarkably intelligent Scotchman, and who had been some years settled at Newport.

Montague's regimental frock, which he perceived under his great coat, made him immediately guess the purport of their errand thither, having heard of the intended *fête*, and that a dinner had been bespoken at the Crown for the officers of the 22d. In answer to their questions respecting the island, he spoke highly in its praise, declaring, though he had travelled over the greatest part of England, Wales, and Scotland, he had never seen a prettier country

town than the one he resided in; and that though he, certainly might have acquired a much larger fortune in a more commercial city, he never could prevail upon himself to quit what he considered as a most delightful situation. The island he esteemed particularly healthy; and Newport was so clean, and possessed so many other advantages, that he was amazed it did not increase more than it had done in point of population.

The master of the boat, who was a native of the island, seconded the Scotchman so ably, that the young men expected to find the environs of Newport a second Eden. They reached Cowes sooner than they expected, and immediately set off in a stage coach, with their Scotch companion, for the place of their destination. They were set down at the Crown, where they parted with Mr. Mackintosh, after receiving a very pressing invitation to visit him before they left the town: every child could direct them

to Alexander Mackintosh's, Banker and Hatter. They promised to look in upon him in the course of the day; and then, after refreshing themselves, set out to take a survey of Carisbrook-Castle; they next took a cursory view of the highly-praised town of Newport, and thought it a clean, and possibly a healthy residence; but it did not in other respects strike them as deserving all the praises bestowed upon it by the North Briton.

It was near three, the appointed dinner hour (that they might have plenty of time to adorn for the evening), before the other Officers arrived; who all agreed Montague had pursued the wisest plan, and wished they had accompanied him, as it was now too late to think of visiting the castle, or even the town.

In consequence, as they were all anxious to see as much as the time would allow, their party broke up almost immediately

after dinner: and as the ball was not to begin before nine, Montague proposed to Henry visiting their Scotch friend before they sat down to their toilet.

Mr. Mackintosh lived in an adjoining street; and the first person to whom they applied to direct them, conducted them to his door. The house made a very handsome appearance, and they met with a most hearty welcome from both him and his wife, who were sitting by an excellent fire in a large comfortable paved kitchen, which opened into a very good garden. The wife, who seemed to possess an infinite fund of gay humour, requested them in broad Scotch to be seated, handing them chairs for that purpose.

“Nae be surpris’d, gentlemen,” she said, “to find, though we have got sic a large and gude hoose, that we prefer the back to the front of it. ’Tis my fancy, and my gude mon loves his Moggy fae weel,
that

that he seldom contradicts her. I prefer comfort to shew, ye ken; and though I live in my kitchen aw winter, I flatter mysel 'tis as clean as ony parlour in summer. I like the rooms next the street; but here I can enjoy the morning sun, which delights me during my breakfast. We eat our dinner hot from the fire, and my tea is as gude again when my water is nae carried about frae the kitchen to the parlour; and this ye shall experience, my gude friends, for I wish ye to remember the comfortable dish of tea ye met with at Sandy Mackintosh's, that ye may be tempted to visit us again, though ye were received in a kitchen."

O'Brien declared himself a convert to her system, and entered so unaffectedly into her sentiments, encouraging her gaiety so much by his droll remarks, that she declared, "if she had but had sic a bairn by her dear Sandy, she should be the happiest woman in aw Britain."

Her tea, as she had promised them, was excellent ; and the more free her young guests made, the more pleased she appeared. She was pressing them to taste some cracknels, a sort of cake peculiar to the island, when a violent ringing at the street-door made her exclaim — “ Here comes my torment ; step and let the foolish fellow in, Mary,” turning to her assistant rather than her servant, “ for ten to one if any of his men are at home. ’Tis a pure silly body of a Baronet, an Officer in one of the regiments now here, who, taking advantage of my gude temper, prevailed upon me to take him into my hoose ; but if I could once see the back of him, he should nae darken my doors again.”

“ Pray, by what name is this favourite of your’s distinguished ?” asked Montague.

“ Oh ! ’tis a Sir Peter Reresby, who fancies money entitles the possessor to take any liberties with any body.”

“ I had the supreme advantage of being at Winchester school with him,” said O’Brien.

“ His

“His father, Sir William, is lately dead, if I mistake not.”

“Ye are perfectly reeght, my gude friend. I have heard this hopeful sprig of Nobility tauk about Winchester.”

Before she could finish her sentence, the person they were talking about, who affected the airs of a dashing buck, walked into the kitchen, enquiring—“Where are all my fellows, Mrs. Mackintosh?”

“Yere fellows, Sir Peter, are nae in my keeping; I nae ken nor care what has got them; perhaps they are gone to the ball.”

To be thus familiarly treated before strangers highly offended the Baronet. Montague enjoyed his visible mortification, overbearing pride having been Sir Peter's predominant failing while at school; and wondered whether he had heard of his marriage, or whether, admitting he had not, he would deign to recognize an old schoolfellow, whom he had at Winchester considered as

greatly his inferior. He had not taken off his great coat by Mrs. Mackintosh's desire, who observed that paved rooms were always colder than those which were boarded, and he might feel the difference more sensibly than she wished, if he laid aside his weather coat. This he now buttoned sufficiently close to conceal his dress; and rising while he spoke, said—"I am happy to see you at Newport, Sir Peter, and still more rejoiced to find we are inhabitants of the same house."

The great man glanced his eyes over him, but affected neither to recollect his features nor his voice.

"My name is Montague O'Brien, Sir Peter; I was the head boy at Winchester when you left that school. I have not been many hours in Newport, where I came consigned to the care of Mr. Mackintosh, who has kindly undertaken to instruct me in one branch of his business. May I hope you will

will favour me with your custom when I set up for myself?"

"Ye certainly canna refuse to encourage sic a bonny lad, Sir Peter," said the diverted Mrs. Mackintosh. "But perhaps, as ye are old schoolfellows, ye may think of providing for him in a more honourable way. 'Tis almost a pity, I tell him, to dirty sae handsome a hand in our filthy business."

"You and your friend, or perhaps your apprentice, Ma'am, seem very much inclined to be more familiar than meets my approbation. I certainly was brought up at Winchester, and there was a boy upon the foundation, of the name of O'Brien; but I shall forbear saying any thing more about him at present."

Montague, who stood facing him, opening his great coat, said in a tone even more haughty than the Baronet's,—“ I must insist upon your explaining the meaning of your last sentence, Sir Peter. I acknowledge

ledge I have hitherto been joking with you, and beg your pardon for taking such a liberty with a man of your consequence: I thought you would have been happy to have met an old schoolfellow. But pray what have you to say of Montague O'Brien, that you affect to hint would not redound to his honour?"

The consequential Baronet, whose colour, no longer heightened by arrogance, had even all forsook his cheeks, scarcely knew what to say. Montague was evidently in the Army, and of his courage he had given convincing proofs at school. He therefore, forcing a smile, stammered out,—“Though you are so fond of fun, O'Brien, you cannot take a joke I perceive. You were quizzing me, and I wished to retaliate, but not to offend you, I give you my word of honour. We shall meet at the ball, I presume?”

“Most probably, Sir Peter,” replied Montague, reseating himself; “and we may
there

there renew our jokes or our intimacy, as best suits your inclination."

"Ha! ha! ha!" faintly laughed the Baronet, "the same droll fellow you always was, O'Brien! Adieu till we meet again," hurrying away as he concluded.

"There's genuine mirth for ye!" cried Mrs. Mackintosh. "Why, my handsome bairn, ye have terrified my pure lodger oot of his pride. Ye will really make him jocular in time; even my *undue familiarity* may pass unnoticed, and that I shall regret, as I was in hopes he would take pet, and leave his lodgings: for there will be

Nae luck aboot the hoose,
Nor little luck awa;
Nor nae pleasure in the hoose,
Till he be far awa."

As it grew late, Montague and Henry were reluctantly forced to take their leave of this hospitable couple, and return to their inn to dress. Though ever elegant in point of appearance, particularly since his marriage, Montague's fine figure had perhaps
never

never appeared to more advantage than when he entered the assembly room on this evening, where he was almost immediately accosted by Sir Peter Reresby, whose enquiries respecting him had been answered so much to his satisfaction, that he now thought it necessary to court the very youth he had formerly most cordially despised.

“ I hope you have forgiven my silly retaliation of your joke, Montague? I had heard you was to be at Newport; and as you began with me, I thought it but fair to treat you in the same manner. For Heaven's sake, how came you acquainted with that queer Scotch couple where I lodge? though I am assured they are in very good circumstances, but mean to a degree.”

Thus was the Baronet running on, while Montague's whole attention was engrossed by the Colonel of Sir Peter's regiment, the 28th, and a tall elderly emaciated figure, who were in deep discourse within a few paces
of

of them, and whose eyes were, as if by mutual agreement, fixed upon his handsome and now very animated countenance, whenever there was a pause in their conversation. Convinced he was the subject of either their praise or criticism, and conscious their scrutinizing looks were likely to render him an object of curiosity to the company, he felt himself very much hurt, not to say offended, by their behaviour: therefore, without answering Sir Peter's question, he begged to know who that old gentleman was, looking towards the object of his enquiry.

"Oh, one of the queerest old fellows in the known world—an Irishman, and what is better—a Peer. My Colonel is his brother-in-law, and, between ourselves, just such another rude unceremonious mortal. Never mind their staring at you, man; ten to one they intend to pay you a very high compliment. Shall I introduce you to this pair of oddities?"

Montague's

Montague's own Colonel had joined them while the Baronet was making this kind offer; and before he could decide whether he should allow Sir Peter to act as his introducer, approached, saying,—“Allow me, O'Brien, to present you to the Earl of Fitzarran and Colonel O'Hallaran, who are both anxious to be ranked among your friends.”

Montague bowed acquiescence; but before Colonel Danby could run over the necessary forms upon such occasions, the Peer, who was evidently much agitated, caught his hand, and pressing it very hard, assured him he had long wished to be acquainted with him; adding,—“Though I can hardly flatter myself you will think the friendship of such a weather-beaten old fellow as myself worth your cultivating.” Then again eyeing him from head to foot, he broke out—“By Jafus, O'Hallaran, he must be an Irish lad.

The

The tears glittered in his eyes, and he was obliged to relinquish the astonished Montague's hand, while he had recourse to his handkerchief.—“What can occasion his visible emotion?” thought O'Brien; “or have I mistaken a weakness in the eyes for excess of sensibility. *I must be an Irish lad!* So I am on my mother's side.

The Peer, having regained some degree of composure, interrupted his reflections by saying,—“Excuse the folly and weakness of an old man, my dear Sir; I know I have put you to the blush more than once this evening, though it is a sort of sensation I very seldom felt at your age. But I believe I had more vanity than seems to have fallen to your share, my jewel. I liked to be admired, particularly by the ladies; and I was allowed at your age to be one of the finest fellows in dear little Ireland. You remind me of what I once was, so forgive my rudeness; for we must be better acquainted. It is selfish enough in me to form
such

such a wish, you will think, though perhaps you are too polite to say so : but, upon my soul, you won't do me justice, though I don't suppose you can expect to derive either pleasure or satisfaction from my company or conversation. Nevertheless you must dine with me to-morrow : I cannot take a refusal. I reside for the present at Cowes, where more than one reason brought, and now detains me. Among the most trivial, was my wish to get out of the way of a parcel of d——d doctors, who had half poisoned me ; for I have been mending ever since I gave up taking their nauseous medicines. But all this is very foreign to the purpose, and merely concerns myself ; though I am very thankful my life has been spared, for I have a great deal yet to do in this wicked world. But will you favour me with your company ? Your Colonel, I know, will grant you leave of absence."

"Most certainly," replied that gentleman.

"Then I shall undoubtedly avail myself
of

of your Lordship's polite wish that we may be better acquainted," said O'Brien.

"You are a jewel of a boy. Colonel O'Hallaran will call upon you at your own house to-morrow morning, to conduct you to my present abode; for I have many very serious subjects to discuss with you, in which we are both concerned, and which I cannot enter upon where we are."

More and more surprised, Montague began to have his doubts whether the Peer was *compos mentis*; but promised to hold himself in readiness to attend Colonel O'Hallaran at his own time.

"You think me a strange queer mortal; your tell-tale countenance informs," rejoined the now smiling Peer. "But when you are better acquainted with my family history, your wonder will cease. I was not born a great man; and when I was young, principles supplied the place of politeness. But now the case is greatly altered, both
in

in Ireland and England—more's the pity; therefore don't judge me after the present standard: for had I been more polite, ten to one I should have been less sincere; so form no opinion of me till we are better acquainted. I have been a soldier like yourself, and a d——d rakish dog, to my shame be it recorded; but I never broke my word to any mortal breathing, to my knowledge; and I ever loved a man of honour as I love my own soul: therefore judge whether you don't stand pretty high in my esteem. I don't mean to flatter you, young gentleman; but I have, for my own satisfaction, lately made some very minute enquiries respecting you, and, faith! I only wish I could be more explicit: but patience conquers all things, says my wife brother-in-law, and I am afraid I have already put your's to the trial. But before we part, will you be so obliging as to inform me whether you are not the son of the Hon. Charles Egerton, of Lincoln's Inn; whether your mother was not an Irish woman, and if her
name

name was not Frances O'Brien. By Jafus I mean no reflection, nor need you be ashamed of your extraction, young gentleman. But to return to my catechism. You have very lately married Lady Albury, the only daughter of Lord St. Osyth?"

"Your Lordship has been very rightly informed," replied Montague. "I owe my birth to Counsellor Egerton and an Irish lady, whose name I bear. I am married to the lady you mention, and honoured by the friendship and regard of her father."

"Then I foresee he and I shall grow intimate," rejoined the Peer. "But I won't take up any more of your time at present. Shall you be stirring by twelve o'clock to-morrow?"

"Undoubtedly, my Lord."

"I will call upon you between that and one, Mr. O'Brien," said Colonel O'Hallaran; "for I know my brother will think every minute an age till you meet again. We had laid a plan to detain you upon your arrival at Cowes; but you took such an advance upon

your friends, that you frustrated our wise scheme."

"Faith! you quite outwitted us," interrupted the Earl, "or you would not have seen my mahogany phiz among such a large party of elegant men and handsome girls. But give me your hand once more, and believe me you have not a more sincere friend than myself. So God bless you till we meet again; only remember when once I get you into my clutches, I shall not part with you under four-and-twenty hours."

"I give your Lordship free leave to put him under arrest for your own time," said Colonel Danby, returning towards them, "should he prove refractory."

"Thank you, brother soldier," cried the Earl: "and as I have no more business here, I think I will remove my gaunt figure to a more proper place for old invalids. Half the ladies in the room are, no doubt, putting up prayers for my speedy departure. Colonel Danby, your most obedient; I wish you a great deal of pleasure, my young friend."

O'Hallaran,

O'Hallaran, a word in your ear," seizing his arm, and leaving the room."

Colonel Danby had not overheard all that had passed between the Peer and O'Brien; therefore merely smilingly observed, "He is a very great oddity, though a most respectable character, and as such I recommend your cultivating his acquaintance, O'Brien; such friends always do a young man honour."

Montague bowed assent, but was very much perplexed to account for the visible interest with which he seemed to have inspired his Lordship. To his own certain knowledge he had never seen him before; then what could have induced a total stranger to have made any, much more such particular enquiries respecting him?

These various reflections rendered him so exceedingly inattentive, that he more than once put the festive set whom he had

joined into confusion, and secretly wished he could, with any degree of politeness, have made his exit from the ball-room, that he might ruminate at leisure upon the anxiety Lord Fitzarran had displayed, and the strange questions he had put to him. Perhaps he had known his mother; yet had her connections been in so high a line, she would surely never have condescended to accept the degrading title of Counsellor Egerton's mistress. The more he reflected upon his Lordship's behaviour, the more he was bewildered.

The ball was, however, kept up till broad daylight; it therefore became absurd for any of the Southampton party to think of going to bed, as they were all to set sail from Cowes on their return, by twelve at latest; so that they merely changed their dress before they sat down to breakfast: after which, those who had never seen Carisbrook Castle, hastened thither, while Montague, having slipped out unperceived, took

took a solitary stroll by way of indulging his private reflections undisturbed. He had rambled about for near an hour, vainly endeavouring to account for what appeared, every succeeding minute, more and more extraordinary, namely, Lord Fitzarran's behaviour—when it struck him he had not yet informed Melcombe that he should not return so soon as he had intended to Southampton, and blamed himself for not having told the Peer he had come over with a friend, as he might in that case have extended the invitation to Henry, whom he must now suffer to return with his brother Officers.

As it became necessary to give some reason for remaining behind, he hastened back to the inn for that purpose; but was so absorbed in thought, that he actually passed Henry within a few yards of the house. The young merchant had remarked his very unusual absence of mind the preceding evening, and could not more satisfactorily

factorily account for his having so sedulously avoided joining any party after breakfast. Curiosity therefore now tempted him to hail him, and to enquire in a gay tone whether he was not walking in his sleep.

“Upon my honour I hardly know whether I ought to be deemed awake,” replied O’Brien; “for I was very unconscious of being so near you.”

“Perhaps you were reflecting upon the beauties of your partner,” said Henry.

“Not absolutely; for indeed I much doubt whether I should know her again by daylight.”

“I can believe you, for she expressed a similar doubt in my hearing; and observed, though you were certainly the handsomest man in the room, you were also the least talkative.”

“I know I gave her infinite room for complaint; for though I scarcely ever entered a ball-room in better spirits, I never spent a less agreeable evening. You saw Colonel Danby introduce me to Lord Fitzarran;

Fitzarran; and his discourse has conjured up such a set of strange ideas, that I think I shall not be myself again this week. I am engaged to dine and sleep at his villa at Cowes. Perhaps by the time I return to Southampton, which I mean to do to-morrow afternoon, I shall be rather better company. At present you ought to rejoice that I am necessitated to remain behind. I was not permitted to put a negative upon his Lordship's invitation."

"If you ever give me reason to suppose I am the least restraint upon you, I shall that moment leave Southampton, much as I enjoy your society," interrupted Henry; "and must insist upon your not leaving Cowes a moment sooner upon my account. By way of doing penance, I can spend this evening at my aunt's; her regular hours will exactly suit me to-night."

He was proceeding, when Montague heard himself hailed from the window

ALTAMONT FAMILY.

of a cariot, which almost instantly stopped, when Lord Fitzarran, putting out his hand, exclaimed,—“I thought it was you, my young friend, but little expected to have seen you abroad so soon. I have just parted from O'Hallaran, who will be punctual to his appointment. I hope you have not forgot your's.”

“Your Lordship must suppose my memory uncommonly treacherous. I hope you caught no cold last night?”

“Not that I am yet aware of. I can't say I slept much, but my reflections were of so agreeable a nature, that they perfectly compensated for my want of rest. My brother-in-law is in tolerable snug quiet quarters, and I was his guest.”

“Had I known where to find your Lordship, I should not have trusted to chance for an opportunity of enquiring after your health.”

“You are very obliging, my dear O'Brien. If my most sanguine expectations are disappointed, I shall still hope you will consider me
as

as one of your best friends. But I must bid you good morning; I am hastening home to give a few orders to my numerous suite, else I am afraid such an influx of strangers will reduce us to short commons," telling his coachman to make the best of his way.

Henry had walked forward when the carriage stopped; but now rejoined his friend, with whom he returned to the town, where the Officers were assembling previous to their departure, and with whom it was agreed Henry should return. They had scarcely all drove from the door, before Colonel O'Hallaran's postchaise drew up. Montague therefore reached Cowes nearly as soon as his friends. He had hoped his companion, who he was certain was in the Earl's confidence, would have explained what had thus induced so total a stranger to court his friendship; but, as if on purpose, Colonel O'Hallaran selected the most general subjects, and cautiously avoided giving Mon-
tague

ALTAMONT FAMILY.

... opportunity to express his surprise at Lord Fitzarran's behaviour; thus preventing any explanation from taking place, or any remarks being made upon the subject nearest O'Brien's heart.

END OF VOL. I.



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